

“La Bible en ses Traditions”
The New Project of the *École biblique*
et archéologique française de Jérusalem
Presented as a “Fourth-Generation” Enterprise

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“We might do a number of creative things.”

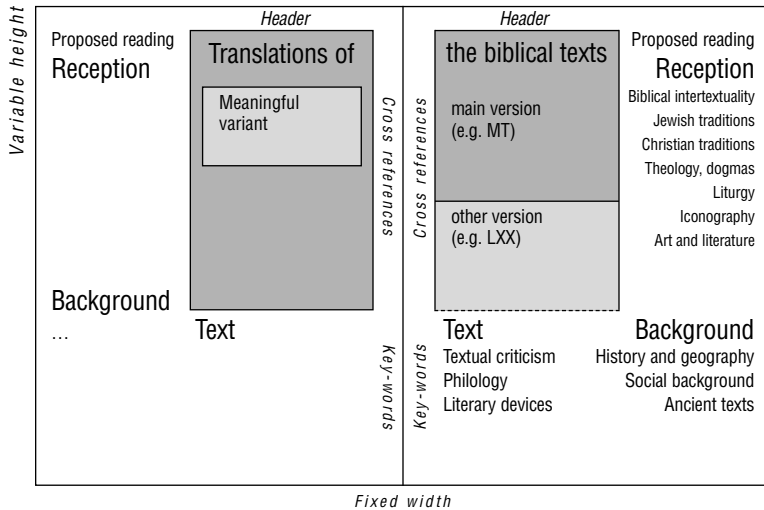
—L. T. Johnson¹

SUCH A REFRESHING approach to biblical scholarship as Johnson and Kurz’s has, of course, struck us here in Jerusalem at the *École biblique*. For a long time indeed several of us have been involved in a reflection on a recasting of the *Bible de Jérusalem*, taking into account the requirements of a comprehensive exegetical agenda that has been emerging since 1956, the date of the first one-volume edition.² It should include: the discovery of the irreducibility of several versions of the same book (or of the same passages of a book); the new importance given to the history of the reception in literary studies, that matches up with the rediscovery of patristic commentaries in exegesis; a greater awareness of the literary aspect of biblical texts, besides their plain historical or doctrinal meaning. In brief, we aim at producing an edition of the Catholic Bible presenting the texts themselves in their diversity, framed by an enriched annotation divided into three main registers.

The first, “Text,” will include all the notes dealing with the linguistic and literary description of the text, from points in textual criticism to more literary remarks. “Background” will group notes dealing with archaeology, history, geography, *realia* or texts of the ancient worlds and cultures, relevant to the production of biblical texts. “Reception” will be the largest zone of annotation; it is to comprise the most important readings of the text throughout history, starting from possible intertextual

¹ L. T. Johnson, in Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 90.

² *La sainte Bible*, traduite en français sous la direction de l’École biblique de Jérusalem (Paris: Cerf, 1956), later called by the public *La Bible de Jérusalem*. For the history of its making, since the first sketches of 1943, see our “Cultural Backgrounds and Challenges of *La Bible de Jérusalem*,” in *Essays in Honour of Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB*, ed. P. McCosker (Oxford: Continuum, forthcoming 2006).

Pattern of two pages of the opened *Bible en ses Traditions*

echoes in parallel texts (in the canonical Bible, in Jewish tradition, or in apocryphal works), and continuing to some of the most important modern readings, including the Church Fathers and medieval theologians. The top corner of each page will present the reading proposed by the exegetes in charge of the book as a result of all preceding notes.

In this contribution, in gratitude to our lucid authors and in thanks to our clear-minded colleagues, I would like to describe our project as a possible answer to some of their most challenging propositions.³ It gives me the opportunity to share with English-speaking exegetes and theologians some aspects of the “scientific project” we worked out two years ago to serve as a *vade mecum* for our scholarly undertakings in the years (or decades) to come.⁴ Permit me to insist on the fact that the following pages are not an official presentation of our project: If any of the views proposed in the next pages shock the reader, let him/her evaluate the project itself and eschew my opinions.

Throughout their book, our authors express judgments or make suggestions that eventually depict what “The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship” could be, granted the rise of a new awareness of what it is

³ I shall not quote many of Kurz’s proposals, as far as they are mostly concrete examples attempting to actualize this theory by studying a series of texts with a view to revealing how they speak to certain contemporary concerns.

⁴ See “La Bible en ses Traditions, projet scientifique,” available at the *École biblique de Jérusalem*. See also the proceedings of one of the conferences preparing this scientific undertaking: J.-M. Poffet, dir., *L’autorité des Écritures* (Paris: Cerf, 2002).

to be a catholic exegete among the fourth (or a fifth?) generation of biblical scholars. These would be very much postmodern scholars,⁵ but according to a Christian version of postmodernity, which inverts the general relativism of postmodern thinkers into the conscious “second naivety” provided by an illuminated faith regarding our possibility to know the truth.⁶ Indeed, postmodern relativism can be of great help for us, to get rid of the exaggerated assumption of being “scientific”—the adjective meaning here objective and close to fact—an assumption that triggered the divorce between biblical exegetes and the life of the Church. Now, we do know that *penser est toujours phraser* (Lyotard) and that every discourse, scientific though it might claim to be, implies a rhetoric, a tradition, and many preconceptions.

La Bible en ses Traditions was not purposely conceived of as a postmodern undertaking. Nevertheless, it is possible to underline several aspects of this undertaking that happen to fit best with the renewed, humble enthusiasm allowed to biblical interpreters by the postmodern softening of the modern “scientific” pattern. That is what I would like to do in the next pages, by following *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* in its both postmodern and Catholic celebrations of language, diversity, otherness, culture, and faith.

Celebration of Language

“In the beginning was the Word”: both the Bible and postmodernity invite us to renew our literary sensitivity. To better relate to one another the biblical text and the ways in which it was read, it is worth studying its literary conditioning in all its dimensions: Sometimes a full theological tradition begins with a minute literary variation that might be perceptible in “original” languages, and blurred in different translations.

Annotation

That is the reason why much attention will be paid to a precise linguistic description of the actual text in the first zone of notes. These notes should embrace the literary phenomenon on all its scales, from the smallest (that of utterances) to the largest (that of the work as a whole). From lexicological particularities to meta-literary teachings, including the

⁵ As Johnson puts it, “as soon as we are able to use the term ‘modernity,’ we find ourselves, willy-nilly, in the posture of postmodernism.”

⁶ On all this, see both J. Milbank’s and C. Pickstock’s works (see also Gavin Hyman’s critical analysis of the way both authors deal with postmodernity: Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism?* (Louisville, London, Leiden, Westminster: John Knox Press, 2001).

identification of literary genres or figures coming from rhetoric (either traditional or new), narratology or semiotics, and the detection of strategies of enunciation, the main significant features relevant to the interpretation of the text should be observed.

Among the five functions that linguistics classically attributes to language, only one—namely the referential—has been really taken into account by exegetes, insofar as that for a long time their main aim has been reaching “historical facts” behind their literary and theological rendering. But there are four others: the “poetic function” related to the signifier considered as a value in itself; the “conative” and the “phatic” one to the pragmatic relationships surrounding utterances (language may be used as a means to draw someone’s attention, or to sustain it); and the “meta-linguistic” one (language may speak about itself—a phenomenon particularly frequent in literatures coming from orality).

Once texts have been worked out in all these dimensions, some exegetical reasonings may collapse, while some traditional readings may appear to be more relevant than expected. Indeed, form criticism was often imbued with cultural prejudices coming from the neo-classical rhetorical mould common to most biblical scholars of the first three generations, concerning the “natural” way of expressing one’s thoughts or the very nature of the act of writing.⁷ Redaction criticism too has very seldom tried to surpass the wholly literary mindset inherited from the culture of the book⁸—which led scholars to interpret doublets sometimes too systematically, for example, in terms of editorial layers, without even imagining that some of them might be remnants of the oral compositions preceding the written texts.

Interestingly enough, the sophisticated celebration of the cultural shaping of all knowledge owed to postmodern thinkers meets with the

⁷ Postmodern thinkers have rightly stated that to compose or to write a text does not mean simply to try to communicate one’s thoughts; what goes on when human beings write is not only a sort of translation of pure preceding thought into words. Indeed, thought is formed only once it has been worded. Moreover, in the very act of speaking or writing lies an implicit assent to the general rules of human communication—including its difficulties, impossibilities, and other phenomena related to a “murkiness” of human relationships. Insofar as they are expressed, one’s ideas are always more than one’s ideas, at least because of the very structure of linguistic signification: The meaning of one word is determined by that of all other words in the language in question; to speak is also to yield to those connotations.

⁸ As J. Dunn stated it a few months ago: “We here are all children of Gutenberg and Caxton. We belong to cultures shaped by the book.” J. D. G. Dunn, “Altering the Default Setting: Re-envisioning the Early Transmission of the Jesus Tradition,” *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003): 142.

teachings of patristic exegesis. The way in which ancient interpreters dealt with texts fits well with the insistence upon textuality as productivity. For example, Johnson reminds us that

Origen seizes on the distinction between what happened in the past and the textual character of Scripture. Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit (so the Church teaches). Therefore *in its language* it inevitably teaches; in the way it is stated, it is meant for our instruction, whatever its relation to ‘what might have happened’ (*Princ.* 4, 1.12–13).⁹

Hence, according to Origen, “our contention with regard to the whole of Scripture is that it has all a spiritual meaning, but not all a bodily meaning; for the bodily meaning is often proved to be an impossibility” (*Princ.* 4, 1.20). Moreover, Origen seems to be sometimes more critical than modernity when the question of the relation between history and theology is raised.¹⁰

Translation

Such a renewed interest in the literary dimension of our texts will have consequences for the art of translating. Linguistic reflection upon truth has taught us an operative conception of signification, instead of the resultative one inherited from the (neo-)classical times. As far as we are now aware that the way leading toward the meaning is itself part of the meaning, we should no longer equate the art of translating with a technique of rendering the same signified with other signifiers. Signification is a journey—not only the end of a way: Translating a text should be building up in the targeted language an analogous linguistic and literary path. The translation we would like to propose ought not only to inform the reader of the “conceptual” content of the biblical text, but also enable him to take an *analogous* literary itinerary to discover the treasure hidden in the field of the words. Translators should mobilize all sorts of literary devices and all levels of language in order to achieve this ideal goal—which supposes poetic imagination and, sometimes, even audacities toward any classical rhetorical canon.

⁹ Johnson and Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 72, emphasis added. Origen is here commenting on 1 Cor 10:11: “These things happened to them typologically, but they were written for our instruction.”

¹⁰ As Johnson puts it, “Events of the past are past (see Mt 12:36). They are, like their actors, dead. But the text is living since it is inspired by the Holy Spirit ([Origen,] *Hom. 1 Sam.* 28, 4, 2)—the meaning the *Spiritus* wishes to teach is found precisely in the literary shaping, whether figurative or not (Jn 10:4). . . . To read the text as a means of recovering the past is to prefer the dead to the living.” Johnson and Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 83.

By no means should one equate this plea in favor of free literary imagination with a call for futility. On the contrary, it is deeply rooted in a theological account of reading as such.¹¹ The close link between the sometimes intricate or painful (literary) way to the meaning of the text and the preparation for God's grace¹² is the main reason why the original text ought to be scrupulously respected. *Ignoratio scripturarum est ignoratio Christi*,¹³ a kind of "physical" continuity from the body of flesh of Jesus to the body of the biblical text,¹⁴ explains why those who believed that, thought even of the slightest details of the written texts.¹⁵ Therefore, just as many phrases or locutions that were understood beforehand in a purely metaphorical way came to be endowed with a proper meaning with the historical coming of Christ—in Jesus, yes, God does have arms and legs—a human being may be sown in the world as well as a word in the heart.

I allude here to a passage of Matthew I worked out last year in the perspective of *La Bible en ses traditions*: Permit me to enlarge a little upon it. In the so-called "explanation" of the parable of the sower, the Greek presents a striking logical discrepancy. Whereas everything was made by the redactor to make us identify the sower and Jesus, in the telling of the parable itself, though such an identification held at the beginning of the "explanation," suddenly in the hyperbaton of verse 19 the hearer, not the word is identified with the seed: "This is he that was sown by the way side."¹⁶ Because for decades the exegesis of parables has mainly consisted in trying to recover Jesus' words, the general trend among commentators is to lessen the importance of the fact, for example by evoking former

¹¹ According to the ancient theology of inspiration, "God's Spirit is at work not only in the ancient author, but at work also in the present reader, prodding and guiding human reason into the wisdom that God seek to reveal here and now about the present and future world." Johnson and Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 57.

¹² The traditional discipline of *lectio divina* rests upon this link, especially the passage from its third to its fourth steps (*oratio, contemplatio*). See Guigues II le Chartreux, *Epistola de vita contemplativa* (scala Claustrialium), in *Lettre sur la vie contemplative (ou échelle des moines)*: Douze méditations, eds. and French trans. E. Colledge and J. Walsh (Paris: Cerf, 1970). See also the context of the famous phrase *divina eloquia cum legente crescunt* in Gregory the Great, *Homilies On the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, quoted on *Homélies sur Ezéchiél*, t. 1, ed. and French trans. Ch. Morel (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 244–45.

¹³ Saint Jerome, *Commentarii in Isaiam*, "Prologus," (CCL 73), 1; or (PL 24), 17.

¹⁴ That "the Bible" as a whole and the real Jesus are in dialectic relationship might be argued from the viewpoint of the history of canon.

¹⁵ Mt 5:18.

¹⁶ Mt 13:19 (ASV).

(oral?) layers of composition, in which (Aramaic?) speakers used holistic ways of expression. In French, they did it up to the point of altering the text in the translation.¹⁷

In fact, what the text means literally is both: that the seed is the word (and the sower is Jesus), and that the seed is the hearer of the word (and the sower is God the Creator)—which ambiguity results in suggesting an enigmatic relationship between Jesus and God and between Jesus and his words. Agreeing with this supposes that not having already set one's mind on the literary genre of verses 18–23: As much as an explanation, it appears as a mere retelling of the parable (neither the identity of the sower, nor the nature of fructification are allegorically elucidated), complicated by enigmatic features. In the narrative, Jesus does not begin “hear, ye, the meaning, nor my explanation of the parable of the sower,” but “Hear then ye the parable of the sower.”¹⁸

Actually, what he is doing in these verses is applying to the disciples the general rule he gave at verse 12: “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance.” Indeed, by asking Jesus why he is speaking to them in parables,¹⁹ the disciples act as if *they* had understood. Therefore, although they do not really need any explanation, as far as they “have” (a certain knowledge of what Jesus intended to mean),²⁰ they deserve to “be given” (more). That is what Jesus does in these verses: He gives them more symbolic teaching (which, we shall suggest later on in this article).

Here again, a postmodern celebration (namely, that of the signifier over against the essentialist overvaluing of the signified) merges with ancient practices: Did not Jerome coin a sort of new Latin language by wishing to respect sometimes even the word order of the biblical text?²¹

¹⁷ Thus, the literary feature was completely erased in the first edition of *La Bible de Jérusalem*, which translated “*tel est celui qui a reçu la semence au bord du chemin*” (Mt 13:19b; ed. 1956). The text was restored in the second edition: “*tel est celui qui a été semé au bord du chemin*” (ed. 1973), but Fr. Benoit chose to maintain in note the following value judgment: “*cette tournure étrange vient d’une certaine confusion dans l’interprétation de la parabole etc*” (note b *ad loc.*), rather than try to go further in interpretation.

¹⁸ Mt 13:18 (ASV).

¹⁹ Cf. Mt 13:9–11 (ASV): “‘He that hath ears, let him hear.’ And the disciples came, and said unto him ‘Why speakest thou unto them in parables?’ And he answered and said unto them: ‘unto you it is given to know.’”

²⁰ In fact, more than that! cf. v. 11 (ASV): “Unto you it is given [or: it has been given: *dedotai*] to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.”

²¹ See A. Michel, *In hymnis et canticis, culture et beauté dans l’hymnique chrétienne latine*, “Philosophes médiévaux,” vol. 20 (Paris, Louvain: Vander-Oyez, 1976), 41–43.

Celebration of Diversity

To stress the legitimacy of the love of our generation for diversity and the opportunity it gives to spread authentic Christianity among them, Johnson draws attention to the first 350 years of Christianity. It was, according to him, a time of religious and cultural pluralism like our age: In that time, skeptical of received certitudes, Christianity appeared as one way among many others.²²

Texts

A similar love for diversity appears in our choice concerning the very texts we shall translate. As regards textual criticism, this Bible will show a preference for a diplomatic way of editing the texts. Indeed, in her wisdom, the Catholic Church never canonized texts, but only books. As Pope Pius XII taught some sixty years ago, the traditional primacy of the *Vulgate* is a “juridical,” not a “scientific,” one. Recent discoveries in the history of texts, especially those provided by the Dead Sea Scrolls, prevent scholars, from now on, to be satisfied with the old stratification that considered the Hebrew masoretic text as the oldest, the Septuagint coming next, and the different (Latin, Syriac, Coptic, etc.) versions after. We do know that the Greek texts reflect sometimes a Hebrew version older than the Masoretic one. In some cases,²³ one should consider each version as an original text, sometimes with its own theological agenda, rather than to try to elaborate an “original” text by comparing them and mixing them up—which resulted in publishing, in modern languages, biblical texts never read before! According to a first evaluation by Fr. Maurice Gilbert, nearly 30 percent of the Old Testament appears in two or three different, irreducible versions.

Rather than producing one more eclectic text, we wish to present the different ways a same work resonated (like a bow) in the echo chambers of the different communities and periods that transmitted it to us. Concretely speaking, it means that the reader will be given the possibility of reading different texts, either in synoptic columns, or in special frames included in the text, or in notes in the register called “Text,” each time multiple versions with significant variations of meaning occur. By restoring the polyphony of text traditions within the Old Testament itself, we

²² As Johnson puts it, “in important ways, we are closer to the earliest Christian interpreters than we might at first imagine, and it is this closeness that enables a conversation across centuries” (63): “we are in a post-Constantinian era”; “we live in a world that is intensely and explicitly pluralistic” (62) in which we are “forced to make [our] way as an intentional community” (63).

²³ For example Jeremiah, or some parts of Sirach.

shall echo the practices of Origen portrayed by Johnson.²⁴ As regards the New Testament, besides the Alexandrine text—epitomized at best by the Nestlé-Aland critical edition—attention should be given to the Byzantine text, the Vulgate, and other versions important in the history of reception.

Annotation

Giving great importance to the depiction of the literary conditioning of biblical texts enables us better to take into account different and sometime contradictory interpretations that were made in the history of its reception. We wish to enlarge and “open” the reading, rather than close or restrict it on the pretext that one knows exactly what the text (or worse, its author) means. In addition, this fits well with the “both/and” approach to the Bible illustrated by Johnson and Kurz.²⁵ Against a “scholarly” either/or ethos, according to which choosing one option in interpreting a text necessarily means rejecting the others, the analytical presentation of the notes will greatly help to retain all the possibilities and to combine them in the most generous way possible. It means that notes should focus on facts, not on hypotheses (consensual though they might be among scholars), in order to give the largest space to the description of textual facts and to the interpretations that they actually brought about in history.

Celebration of the Otherness

In the context of *La Bible en ses Traditions*, such a celebration is nothing less than a theoretical stance: The otherness characterizes the very *making* of this new edition, which collaborators will have to engage other fields of knowledge and specialists with other mindsets.

Other Fields

Obviously, the making of this new kind of Bible requires new skills from the exegete, in comparison with the type of training delivered by present-day institutions, either secular or ecclesiastical (both are indebted to the modern confrontations of rationalism and apologetics). Part of the

²⁴ “Rather than seek to discard readings in favor of the quest for a simple prototype—the instinct of modernity—Origen uses such textual variations as a means of honoring local textual traditions and entertaining new possibilities of meaning.” Johnson and Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 80.

²⁵ With respect to the relationship with pagan wisdoms, Judaism, and early Christianity as well, *La Bible en ses Traditions* hopes to expose “both continuity and distinctiveness (not the same as uniqueness, please note), [which] is congenial to Catholic historiographical and theological instincts.” Johnson and Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 22.

exegete's work will be the (usual) scientific one, but part of it should be a more creative (literary, poetic) one.

The appreciation of otherness will appear in the option for more literal translations, better attuned to the "exoticism" of biblical cultures, especially to the oral matrix of many of our texts. Against the school-teacher's prejudice that condemns repetition, a prejudice more widely spread in French than in any other language, repetitions, plays on words, symmetries should be better preserved than in past translations, which often simplify, in order to fit with the modern concept of clarity.

We shall become more inventive not only as translators, but also as administrators of the general balances among the different registers of notes—which will be, like a poetical composition, a question of ingenious wisdom as much as of science.

Other People

Hardly any scholar masters all the fields of knowledge required by the annotation, so that the work on each book of the Bible may be an opportunity to gather several people with various viewpoints and priorities.

Indeed, among the difficulties we have to face is the fact that we belong to different generations²⁶ and cultural spheres. My language in this paper

²⁶ I particularly enjoyed Johnson's sociological analysis of the history of Catholic biblical scholarship. Yes, at the beginning of the use of historical-critical approaches in the Church, the catholic structure of minds was robust enough to let the exegetes make use of these new tools without being fascinated by them. Indeed Father Lagrange, founder and still inspirer of the *École biblique*, would be a good example of the fruitful synergy of a reliable (Thomist) theology and classical training in the humanities with historical criticism. Yes, from 1943 onward, catalyzed by authoritative invitations to make use of it, the historical-critical pattern became omnipotent not only in biblical studies, but also in other theological fields. But it was not merely a lack of scientificity that was fortunately filled out: Catholic biblical scholars were tempted to forget who they really were meant to be, especially in relationship with the pastoral needs of the Church. Many exegetes of this second generation lost the awareness that historical-critical reading was nothing but one option among others in understanding the sacred text. Since that time the historical-critical dominion over biblical studies began to decline, because at last no real certainty emerged, neither about ancient Israel nor about the origins of Christianity out of two centuries of research. Those interested in reading and transmitting the Bible as Word, the believers, could not be satisfied with this way of dealing with Scriptures. Therefore, the third generation is now striving to recover a better sense of what it is to be a Catholic scientific reader of the Bible: "We would like to find a way to think about biblical interpretation within the church that is not totally defined by academic conventions yet truly has a scholarly quality." Johnson and Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, viii. The fourth one could be that of *La Bible en ses Traditions*!

may surprise readers from cultures other than the “Parisian” one, either exegetes fond of *Deutsche Wissenschaft* or simply exegetes from previous generations; even among my generation, some of us are more sensitive to the reconstruction of the historical meaning, some others to the creativity of the reception. The challenge is to work together without reducing the biblical symphony of diverse divinely inspired voices into a cacophony of rival scholars inspired by generational conflict!²⁷ We shall work together and agree to debate on disputed points.

For my part, I have begun to work on the first Gospel. My assistant and I prepare a first draft of notes for all the registers, taking special care for our own specialties. Then we submit our work to specialists in patristics, ancient Judaism, history of the liturgy, iconography or dogmatics. They are invited to modify our proposals, to correct or even to suppress them, to rewrite them in a more effective way according to the specialty, to add better references. . . . At the end of the process we shall obtain a rich annotation, both unified (insofar as it was first planned by the very few in charge of the book), and diverse (insofar as each register will have been reworked by a specialist of its field according to his own discipline’s standards).

As a result, this Bible should be able to attract all kinds of readers. The analytical annotation facilitates different sorts (hopefully complementary) of readings. Even non-believers should be able to state that faith does not prevent the believers from respecting the fields in which they work and does not break up the community of those who honestly search for the Truth.²⁸

Celebration of Culture

Fundamentally, with all thinkers of our time, we are “deeply aware of the constructed character of human meaning, how much it is connected to faith commitments, how profoundly it is rooted in community traditions.”²⁹ Postmodernity, once deprived of its nihilist postulates, can help biblical

²⁷ This paper is to be read simply as a collection of remarks on the reasons someone with a mindset such as mine has had to collaborate with *La Bible en ses Traditions*, and to promote it as something that many cultured believers as well as biblical scholars dream about. None of my remarks are normative.

²⁸ Here again postmodern thinkers should agree with Catholic theologians on the “both/and” ethos. Contemporary hermeneutics has taught us that both tradition and criticism are at work in any reading: “Loyalty is not the opposite of criticism, but its condition,” since reading a text means always interpreting it according to the premises and practices of a specific reading community. . . . It does not demand the sacrifice of any critical questioning, it demands rightly, from an hermeneutical viewpoint, “the affirmation of that Tradition as the starting point of any inquiry.” Johnson and Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 27.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

scholars recover confidence in cultural mediation: From the outset, cultural, social, literary, philosophical, and theological prejudices shape every thought, and this is not fate, but fact—and should simply be taken into account.

Epistemological Shift

The stress put by *La Bible en ses Traditions* on the linguistic shaping and the historical reception of our texts fits quite well with Johnson's definite stance against a "commitment to the notion of an original and pure good news, a moment of revelation so uniquely untouched by human influence that it is self-evidently divine."³⁰

This notion is a romantic prejudice, inherent in the historical-critical method, which would never have appeared without the classical, rationalist reduction of language to a noetic tool or a mere means of expression. In ancient oral or semi-oral civilizations language was not the scanty instrument modern Western thought has construed: For speakers or hearers of oral circles, language reveals rather than represents. As N. Frye beautifully showed it in his famous book,³¹ the linguistic practice inherent the Bible is not the objective application "signifier/signified" or "word/thing" to which we have been accustomed by the dualist ontology of sign promoted by modern linguistics. In the world of Scripture, events, undetectable without texts that beforehand sharpen the attention of those who live them, come to enlighten these very texts. Inhabitants of this world experience the mutual illuminations of being and letter.

These observations might have frightened believers at the time of positivism, as mere excuses not to be engaged with critical historians, but the situation is now reversed. On one side, any honest thinker of our time should wonder if the circle of preknowledge and knowledge that is working throughout the biblical revelation is different from the hermeneutic circle of the most commonplace knowledge. On the other side, traditional themes like the "fulfillment of Scriptures" now appear first as consequences of the poetical and narrative structure of knowledge, in communities that bore, produced, and handed over the Bible,³²

³⁰ Ibid., 20.

³¹ N. Frye, *The Great Code. The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: Academic Press Canada, 1982).

³² In modern times, to quote the Scriptures means to open books and concordances to make an erudite composition. Such was not the case in the Jewish culture of the first century, for example. In those times, one was taught to read and sometimes to write with (and within) the Bible, so that the Bible itself became a sort of language. The rediscovery of the Jewish art of memory could provide the real hinging upon one another of historicity and "literarity" in the evangelical recitatives. Indeed, it could avoid reducing intertextuality to a persuasive device used a

so that many critical arguments against historicity grounded in the literary shaping and the scriptural perspectives drawn by allusions and quotations fall short. Efforts should be made to recover at least a little of the ancient sense of language so that historical effectiveness should be detected no longer *against*, but *through* the cultural mediations of knowledge. Between the crisis of historical reason and the invading of literary thought, may not fresh studies of the biblical practice of “the fulfillment of Scriptures” open paths for new insights to theologians who do not agree with any reduction of revelation to anything immanent, be it historical or literary?

Theology of Inspiration

By helping to appreciate the cultural conditionings of human communication in the making of the Bible, *La Bible en ses Traditions* could eventually bring about a deeper comprehension of the traditional account of *oeconomia revelationis* taking place “*gestis verbisque intrinsece inter se connectis*.”³³ The *gesta* in question refer as much to the bearing and shaping of the *verba* throughout time, as to the very events told in texts. From the plain lacuna to the most illogical passage, passing through all kinds of textual corruptions and other accidents in the oral or written handing over of the text, what French literary theorists in the 1960s and 1970s called the “rustling” of the text³⁴ do share in “the Word of God in its historical communication,” to speak in the magisterial way.³⁵ These cultural “events,” unspectacular though they may be, belong to the historical communication of God’s Word.

Celebration of Faith

The next convergence of the project *La Bible en ses Traditions* with Johnson and Kurz’s wishes that might be stressed is the role devolved to faith inside the scholarly work of exegetes.

posteriori by a writer, by granting it a concrete basis in actual practices of the ancient times. See beautiful insights on this point in “The Tradition,” ch. 8 of J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus remembered*, “*Christianity in the Making*,” vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 173–254.

³³ *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

³⁴ Cf. R. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. R. Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), French: *Le bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984).

³⁵ That is one of the greatest reasons for relativizing an overly romantic vision of inspiration as a psychological or noetic phenomenon.

Be it only for preparing patristic or theological notes, exegetes should not overlook the teaching of the Church, even under “methodological” grounds. On the contrary, it should be a key part of their agenda, as an invitation to deepen their philological, rhetorical, or semiotic study of the text and its reception, so as to link (the possibility of) their belief with the very text. At least, it should enlarge one’s context of reading and provide new challenging hypotheses. The so-called “literary methods” supply many tools to assess the continuity or the discontinuities between the biblical text and the traditional teachings of the faithful communities. As Kurz shows in his essays about the prologue of John or about John 6, some theological truths that were developed a posteriori may help the reader notice textual facts or literary peculiarities that otherwise would have seemed without interest.

Here again, Church fathers like Origen or Augustine may be of great help, to appreciate that truth is not merely meaning. Beyond the historical meaning/literal sense determined by the historico-critical method, a multifaceted approach of the text should take into account a wide variety of factors deriving from the tradition of the church centered on Christ. Couldn’t we apply to literary richness in general what Origen said about the inspiration?

The divine inspiration of prophetic words and the spiritual dimension of Moses’ Law appeared in full light when Jesus came. It was not really possible to put forward clear examples of the divine inspiration of the ancient Scriptures before the coming of Christ. But the coming of Jesus led all those who might have supposed the Law and the Prophets not to be divine to state definitely that they had been written with the help of a celestial grace.³⁶

If one strives to detect literary links between the linguistic shaping of the texts and the dogmatic teaching of the Church, many amazing “effects of meaning” may be brought to light. Going back for a while to the parabolical discourse of Jesus in Matthew: Isn’t it striking to discern a rather unified theology of the Word and of language as a medium of revelation through the enlarging upon the theme of the Word as a seed,³⁷ specifically

³⁶ Origen, *De Principiis*, IV, 1, 6–7; quoted in Origène, *Traité des Principes*, eds. and French trans. H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti (Paris: Cerf, 1978 and 1980), 252.

³⁷ Usually considered as a *theologoumenon* in the earliest apostolic traditions, it might be related to Jesus’ preaching itself, as far as no Jewish assimilation of the Word to a seed can be found before him. Cf. M. E. Boismard, review of Siegfried Schulz, *Komposition und Herkunft der Johanneischen Reden*, *Revue Biblique* 69 (1962): 422.

expressed in the discourses of John³⁸ and only hinted at in the narrative of Matthew?³⁹

Our stress on the fruitfulness of faith might be related to the post-modern celebration of the irrational, but it inverts its logic. For Christians, reason is not so much determined by infra-rational factors, than by a supra-rational call to reach the very Principle of all possible reason by faith, hope, and love. Ideally our abbreviated “talmud” is to be Christian not only in its content, but also in its very organization: It should not look like a compilation of pieces of information or opinions connected by associations of ideas, as in school discussions, but like an analytical, logical collection attuned to the religion of the *Logos*—*logikè latréia*—which Christianity pretends to be.⁴⁰ Numerous though they will be,

³⁸ Jesus is the Word of God straight from the Prologue. To his disciples, he gives the Word, not only through his words considered as static *performances* to be repeated, but also through a competence to say even greater words. Cf. Jn 14:12: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater [works] than these shall he do.” In the context, the works are Jesus’s words. Cf. Jn 14:10, “the words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works.”

³⁹ The narratological framing of Jesus’ discourse by the only two passages where his familial origins are put into question in Matthew (compare Mt 12:46–50 with Mt 13:53–58) raises in the reader’s mind the question of who Jesus is. The rhetorical discrepancy in the “explanation” of the parable (is the seed the word, or the one who hears it?) raises the question of the identity of the sower (is he Jesus—sower of the word—or the Creator—sower of men who might hear and listen to the word?) and that of the relation between these two possible “sowers.”

Finally, the relationships between Jesus, his word, his disciples, and their words implied in the concluding dialogue between Jesus and the disciples is very similar to that implied in Jn 14:12 (cf. preceding note). “‘Have ye understood all these things?’ They say unto him: ‘Yea.’ And he said unto them: ‘*Therefore* every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.’” (Mt 13:51–52 [ASV], emphasis added.) This *dia touto* refers to the very answer of the disciples. As far as they have understood, they shall be able to speak in a way similar to that of Jesus, and to devise means to tell all “these things” by combining not only new interpretations with ancient Scriptures, but also new developments with Jesus’ words.

⁴⁰ Against the growing (postmodern) defiance of reason, J. Ratzinger reiterates this ancient pretence of worship according to the *Logos*. See, for example, J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (*Der Geist der Liturgie*; Verlag: Herder, 2000), trans. J. Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), read in the French trans., *L’esprit de la liturgie*, trans. G. Catala and G. Solari (Genève: Ad solem, 2001), 38–41. God’s *Logos*—both Intelligence and Word—who grants human being as well as angels intelligence and word, “incorporated” in the Scriptures, incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, leads the whole humankind to resurrection in his paschal

comments on the text will look like a verbal galaxy moving around an invisible center which is the mystery of Christ.

Invitation

I would like to end with what I find one of the most challenging propositions of L. T. Johnson: "Catholics should be concerned not only with the world that produced the New Testament, but as well with the world that the New Testament itself produced."⁴¹ To be even more challenging, let us put the last verb in the future: Catholic scholars have to be concerned with the world that the New Testament and the Bible in general *will* produce.

Indeed, biblical scholars *are* cultural agents: not only because they bring preconceptions, either linguistic/literary or philosophical or theological, from their social and intellectual milieu, but also because they themselves take part in the ongoing process of culture. They produce works and books, which in their turn influence that surrounding milieu. The most fruitful relationships between the Bible and the cultures that read it in the past were oriented from the Bible to culture.⁴² It is only the spreading of the positivist historical paradigm over all fields of knowledge, which overturned the direction of this relationship by judging the Bible only by secular standards. To reconstruct the "historical" original context and audience of the texts, scholars tended to reduce them to other ideas, customs, or phenomena known beforehand through other ancient documents or scholarly studies. Thus, the creativity of the authors or their addressees, the newness of the text, the fruitfulness of its effects (in brief, its revelatory function) tended to be blurred.⁴³

mystery. In the Christian rite, the human logos is reached, purified, and magnified by the eternal *Logos* of the Creator.

⁴¹ Johnson and Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 23.

⁴² The promoters of a new French translation of the Bible three years ago badly missed this point by contending that every generation in the past had adapted the sacred Book to its own needs. On the contrary, past generations changed their cultural habits—sometimes even their language to receive the Bible. Cf. O.-Th. Venard, "La culture de la Bible Bayard," *Képhas* 1 (2002): 129–40, esp. 138–40.

⁴³ Therefore, it is of tremendous importance to recall that "the historical moment does not exhaust the process of criticism." Johnson, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 28. "Criticism has philosophical, theological, moral and aesthetic dimensions that are at least as legitimate and important as the historical." Ibid. "Historical knowledge"—especially built up as it is since the modern concept of historical fact was invented, "plays a limited role within a complex conversation enacted by a faith community." Ibid.

In fact, as a keystone of the whole Bible, the New Testament is not a pure mnemonic device conserving the archives of the Founder and the beginnings of his community. To describe itself, the primitive Christian literature uses mainly two words: testimony and seed.⁴⁴ Perceiving truth as exactitude and correspondence, the first leans upon the past (and calls for historical reconstitutions and historiographical debates). Envisaging truth as fruitful dynamism, the second is turned toward the future (and invites to spiritual experiment, ethical commitment, and creative engagements). Biblical texts are as much places to live nowadays as sources of information about ancient times. Taking into better account the fecundity of the text may mean to depart from a severe “scientific” attitude inherited from the Protestant world; but it will certainly bring us closer to our Judaic roots.⁴⁵

Once achieved—in fifteen, thirty, or sixty years⁴⁶—*La Bible en ses Traditions* could greatly help our contemporaries to embrace the holistic approach to Scripture that Johnson and Kurz promote: produced by a

⁴⁴ In the New Testament, *sperma* that may have symbolized first the Mosaic law (Jas 1:23–25), designates the whole revelation, especially that coming from Jesus (Jas 1:18–22; 1 Pt 1:23–25; synoptic parables of sowing), and finally Jesus himself (Jn 1:13; Jn 12:24). Very significantly, *kokkos* (grain) is used only to symbolize the faith (Mt 17:20 and par.), Jesus' body in the Easter mystery (Jn 12:24), the believers' bodies sowed on earth and destined to rise up again (1 Cor 15:37). Sowing and harvesting become usual metaphors for the future fruitful mission of the disciples, suggesting both innovation (one grain has to produce many others) and faithfulness (from one sowing to the other, the grain must hold its nature and quality).

⁴⁵ “Luther was surely right when he saw Catholicism as closer to Judaism than to Protestantism. An observant Jewish community is structured by *halakah*. So is Catholicism. Jewish scholars are freed by the strong identity formation accomplished by *halakah* to engage Torah haggadically, that is, not only as a collection of rules, but above all as a source of wisdom. So are the Catholic biblical scholars free to engage Scripture in a variety of imaginative ways as a source of transforming wisdom.” Johnson and Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 31. At the same time, we should not reduce text reading to elaborating moral rules. Literary imagination should retain its own value as part of a contemplative life. “By no means every reading of the text within the church, however is for the purpose of deciding *halakah*. Much reading is for wisdom and delight, for the transformation of the mind and the conversion of the heart. In such reading both communities and individuals can enter into the imaginative world constructed . . . by the Bible.” Ibid., 32.

⁴⁶ Please do not be discouraged! Like the first *Bible de Jérusalem*, each book of the Bible will be released separately, both in French and in the original modern language of scholars who will have prepared it, as soon as it is finished and approved by the Steering Committee. Thus, it will be possible to improve them thanks to readers' criticisms before collecting them in “the” Bible (which should not be more than three times larger than the present-day *Jerusalem Bible*).

Christianity once more facing towards its Origin, it could even “incarnate” it, as a sort of “Christian Talmud.” All biblical scholars or scholars of other fields touched by the annotation we project will be very welcome to share in the imagining and—*Deo iuvante*—realization of this future.

Re-Entering the Scriptural World

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IT SHOULD BE SAID from the beginning that this book accomplishes what its title promises: It does present a genuinely “constructive” conversation on the future of Catholic biblical scholarship by two leading Catholic biblical scholars. It is, moreover, an important conversation, and one that opens toward the future in a promising way, not only for Roman Catholics. Though I am going to proceed now to raise some questions about the conversation as it has developed so far, I should not like anything I say to obscure my gladness that these issues are being discussed along these lines, nor my gratitude to the authors for their work.

In their attempt to envision a distinctively Roman Catholic approach to biblical scholarship, the authors take a path that my colleague Michael Root has called “oppositional self-definition.” That is to say, they identify a paradigm of biblical study that they take to be undifferentiatedly Protestant and historical-critical (more will be said later about this assumption) and define their “Catholic” paradigm by the ways in which it would contrast with this “Protestant” approach. The Protestant-Catholic division is taken entirely for granted, as a fixed and unquestioned feature of the landscape. Thus Professor Kurz writes:

Since it is intuitively obvious that Catholics differ from Christians of other denominations in how they worship, pray, and emphasize sacraments, it stands to reason that Catholics will always have at least some significantly different beliefs from members of other denominations or religions, as well as from nonbelievers, no matter how ecumenical they endeavor to be. (264)

Notice here the acceptance of the ecumenical status quo as axiomatic: “it is intuitively obvious. . . . It stands to reason.” No awareness is displayed of a century of ecumenical discussion that has worked with great intensity to break down the “obviousness” of many perceived differences

between Catholics and Protestants. For example, one could not tell from this that there is now a mutually recognized

“consensus in the basic truths” of the doctrine of justification among Lutherans and Roman Catholics, a doctrine described by both parties as “more than just one part of Christian doctrine, . . . an indispensable criterion that constantly serves to reorient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ.”¹

It is unfortunately no surprise to ecumenists when theological scholarship in all fields and on all sides ignores the ecumenical dialogues; but one might have hoped for more in a book calling for a more ecclesially grounded biblical scholarship, especially given the teaching of Pope John Paul II that ecumenism is not “some sort of appendix” added on to the essential work of the Church, but is rather “an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does.”²

Notice too how in Professor Kurz’s formulation there is no recognition of any “hierarchy of truths” or any other way of sorting out and weighing differences among Christians. Indeed, he simply lines non-Catholic Christians up with adherents of non-Christian religions and non-believers, and describes the relationship of Catholics to all three groups with the same term: “significantly different beliefs.” I am quite sure that Professor Kurz does not intend the implications of what he has written here; in the fact that he *did* write it, however, we see the power of the status quo of Christian division that can make it seem natural to lump together with non-Christians those fellow Christians with whom Catholics share “some, and even most, of significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself.”³ Furthermore, even with regard to intra-Christian relations, the notion of “significant differences” is left entirely unanalyzed. Are all such differences *equally* significant? And just how significant are they *for biblical study* in comparison with what Catholics and other Christians believe in common?

When Professor Johnson comes to discuss ecumenism explicitly a few pages on, the picture does not brighten appreciably. Catholic biblical scholarship should be “ecumenical,” he says, in four ways: (1) It should renounce triumphalism, and (2) cooperate with Protestant scholarship on

¹ The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), par. 18.

² Pope John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, no. 20.

³ Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis redintegratio*, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 3, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, ed. Norman Tanner (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990).

“tasks which can be carried out in relatively neutral fashion.” Further, Catholic scholars should (3) have “deep respect for different faith perspectives” operative in biblical study, but also (4) “celebrate the sensibilities that are distinctively Catholic” (267). One could, I believe, describe this as an essentially “multi-culturalist” version of ecumenism. Difference is taken to be the bottom line; no real reconciliation or synthesis is envisioned: “Ecumenism does not demand the removing of differences.” Each party should rather respect the otherness of the “other” while at the same time insisting on remaining “other,” on retaining its own distinct “sensibilities.” This emphasis on “sensibilities” is, I fear, revealing. Johnson does not speak of “celebrating the truths of which we are confident” but of celebrating a set of attitudes and sympathies that make “us” the way we are. In other words, it is the *identities* we have formed in our divisions from one another that are finally sacrosanct, and for their sake the divisions have to be maintained. We may, perhaps, exchange gifts across the lines of divisions—Americans can learn to like couscous without becoming Moroccans—but the other must nonetheless remain other, so that we may remain the same.

Doubtless I exaggerate unfairly, as far as either author’s intentions and conscious attitudes go. But rhetoric has its own dynamic, and the absence of countervailing impulses in the book makes it legitimate, I believe, to ask in what direction the force of this rhetoric would take Catholic biblical scholarship. Already in the book itself there are problematic indications. Thus, in the paragraph I have been criticizing, Professor Johnson writes:

Catholics cannot find in Paul’s language about justification by faith the same depth of significance that Lutheran scholars do. Reformed readers cannot appreciate Paul’s language about sanctification in the same manner as Catholics. (267)

What is the force of the “cannot” in these sentences? Does it express a normative *principle*: “Catholics, as Catholics, cannot be as taken with Pauline language about justification by faith as Lutheran scholars are”? If so, then how odd for the Catholic Church to affirm together with Lutherans that the scriptural message of justification “directs us in a special way toward the heart of the New Testament witness to God’s saving action in Christ”!⁴ Or is Professor Johnson registering this lesser appreciation on both sides as a *fact* so massive that it must simply be taken for granted? That would, it seems to me, raise difficult questions about just what defines

⁴ Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration*, no. 17.

“distinctively Catholic sensibilities,” for it would suggest that Professor Johnson’s Catholic sensibilities are quite different from those of St. Augustine or St. Thomas Aquinas, who show no signs of finding *less* “depth of significance” in the Pauline language of justification than Lutherans do, even though they may not always find precisely the same significance. Likewise, if I as a Protestant “cannot” appreciate Pauline language about sanctification as Catholics do, then it would seem that *my* Protestant sensibilities are vastly different from those of the Puritans or John Wesley, not to mention (in my own tradition) untold numbers of Lutheran Pietists over the centuries.⁵ Who then is the *real* Catholic, Augustine or Professor Johnson’s “Catholics”? Who is the *real* Protestant, the “Reformed readers” whom Professor Johnson has in mind, or the Puritans and Pietists?

The truth is that ecumenism has everything to do with the removal of differences, not to be sure all differences, which would be insane, but *those differences that prevent us from living the life of the Church together* as one visible people.⁶ As reading Scripture together is an integral part of the Church’s life, it follows that ecumenism does aim at removing those differences that render Catholic and Protestant biblical scholarship *separate* enterprises that converge on secular ground but remain divided theologically and spiritually. Ecumenism classically conceived certainly aims to conserve and integrate the *truths* perceived by the various parties, but it is intentionally rather hard on “sensibilities” all round, especially insofar as those sensibilities have themselves been formed by the distorted situation of institutionalized disunity.⁷ There is an *aspect* of being “Catholic” or “Lutheran” that stands in the same relation to being “one in Christ” as being “slave or free, Jew or Greek, male and female” (Gal 3:28). Not the

⁵ And, I would argue, different from those of Luther himself, though I cannot make that case here. See my article “Martin Luther on Renewal and Sanctification: Simul Justus et Peccator Revisited,” in *Sapere teologico e unità della fede: Studi in onore del Prof. Jared Wicks*, eds. Carmen Aparicio Valls, Carmelo Donato, and Gianluigi Pasquale (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2004), 655–74.

⁶ See on this Michael Root, “Identity and Difference: The Ecumenical Problem” in *Theology in Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce D. Marshall (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 165–90. For a recent attempt to restate the rationale and goals of classic visible-unity ecumenism, see *In One Body Through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

⁷ Recall here the statement in *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 4, that in the wake of Christian divisions, “the Church herself finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all its bearings.” That would seem to suggest the possibility that “Catholic sensibilities” in their present state are not necessarily adequate to the catholicity of the Church.

whole of being Catholic or Lutheran, not even *every* difference of sensibility, is called into question by unity in Christ, but convergence in Christ will not leave us as we are, and it is most likely to be our “sensibilities” that take the brunt of the change.

Oppositional self-definition imposes on those who adopt it an imperative to be “distinctive” at all-costs the consequences of which can be both strange and debilitating. R. R. Reno has in a brilliant essay described the dynamic of this debilitation with both Roman Catholic and Protestant illustrations.⁸ In the Roman Catholic case, he argues that the now-lamented ecclesiological “juridicism” of the post-Reformation period is grounded in the logic of oppositional self-definition. In order to distinguish Roman Catholicism cleanly from the Protestant “other,” it became necessary to center Roman Catholic identity on features of Roman Catholic life not shared with Protestants (or the Orthodox), which turned out to be most clearly the papacy and the institutional and legal structures that bound the Roman Catholic Church to the papacy. Commenting on the late nineteenth-century fundamental theology of John Brunsmann, Reno writes:

Brunsmann’s analysis shifts the focus of Roman Catholic theology and ecclesial life away from the primary apostolic tradition (because that which is shared is unable to identify the church), and in so doing, greases the skids toward cultural captivity. The power of jurisdiction is easily assimilated to the logic of modern bureaucracies: commercial, military, and governmental. Thus at the very moment that the Roman Catholic Church is clearly distinguished from all other churches, it blurs into the landscape of modern life.

Reno is not suggesting that Catholics should surrender what they believe to be true about the right order of the Church; the issue is rather the consequences of defining Roman Catholic identity in this way rather than, say, by reference to the faith of the Apostles’ Creed. In our present context, juridicism is not the issue, nor is my purpose a general criticism of post-Reformation Roman Catholic thought. Indeed, I would willingly stipulate that the outworking of the same dynamic in Protestantism has brought about far more abject forms of cultural captivity than Roman juridicism. I draw attention rather to the *pattern* Reno describes, because I suspect that the dynamic of oppositional self-definition has weakened our authors’ proposal in a very different but perhaps isomorphic way.

⁸ R.R. Reno, “The Debilitation of the Churches,” in *The Ecumenical Future*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 46–72.

It is, at any rate, rather disappointing when “what’s Catholic about Catholic biblical scholarship” turns out to be that “to be Catholic is to think inclusively rather than exclusively,” to “tend toward the ‘both/and’ rather than the ‘either/or’” (5). Can “being Catholic” in biblical scholarship really be summed up in a formula so bland and empty of content? Is this formula really expressive of the heart and soul of Roman Catholicism, of what makes liturgy and devotion and public witness and the lives of the saints and martyrs tick? Or is this formula not rather drastically overdetermined by the imperative of distinguishing Catholics from the Protestant-historicist other, in the context of a scholarly field in which substantive agendas very often come disguised as methodological axioms? And could not a case be made that this “methodologism” is itself a significant cause of the theological vacuity in biblical studies, that is, of the very problem the authors are attempting to address?

Reno suggests that in defining ourselves over against other Christians, we lose the power of distinguishing ourselves from the world around us, “greasing the skids toward cultural captivity.” I wonder if we cannot see the beginnings of such a slide in Professor Johnson’s proposals, in chapter 5, for a retrieval of elements of pre-critical exegesis. Amidst much that is insightful in that chapter, there are some jarring notes. For example:

People act on the basis of the imagined world in which they dwell. By acting on what they imagine, they help establish their worlds as real. . . . [T]hose who act on the basis of the world Scripture imagines . . . make it less ‘imaginary’ and more ‘real.’ . . . Living in any of these imaginary worlds requires a fundamental acceptance of its premises, an adjustment of vision according to its perceptions, and a decision to act as though these premises and perceptions were not only real but valid. Because Scripture imagines the world in which we live and move as having its source and meaning in an Other who enables us to move and live, we are able to perceive the world this way and decide to live according to this premise. So perceiving and so acting, we incrementally transform the world imagined by Scripture into the physical world in which we live and move. (121–22)

It is of course true that Scripture calls us to a new way of imagining the world. But there is a great difference between an *imagined* world and an *imaginary* one. What are we to make of the notion that we “make” the scriptural world “less ‘imaginary’ and more ‘real’” when we “decide” to act “as though its premises were not only real but valid.” Can we really imagine any premodern exegete speaking of the Scriptures as providing an “imaginary world” which it is *our* task to make “more real”? Surely the

classic view was that of John Henry Newman, “that we are in a world of mystery, with one bright Light before us, sufficient for our proceeding forward through all difficulties.”

Take away this Light, and we are utterly wretched—we know not where we are, how we are sustained, what will become of us, and of all that is dear to us, what we are to believe, and why we are in being. But with it we have all and abound.⁹

For Newman and the tradition, we do not make the scriptural world real; Scripture sets forth to us the reality of the world to which our foolish minds have been darkened by sin (Rom 1:21). The scriptural world is antecedently the real world; Scripture itself is the lamp whose light shows us the reality with which we have to do, so that we do not crash and burn on its hard surfaces and sharp corners.

Professor Johnson himself has described this classic view quite well in his descriptive account of premodern exegesis, one of whose premises is “that the Bible, as the Word of God, is authoritative” (55), which means that readers are to view Scripture as “a text that can reveal the mind of God” (56). But surely when the mind of God is revealed to us, we are not presented with imaginative possibilities that we are then called to “make more real,” but with the bedrock of reality itself. Johnson describes his talk of Scripture’s imaginary world as “postmodern,” and he is undoubtedly correct in this. But just how is postmodernism more properly “Catholic” than modernism? Reno’s pattern begins to seem uncomfortably pertinent: By defining himself contrastively over against Protestant modernism, has Professor Johnson “greased the skids” toward a captivity in which “Catholic,” remarkably enough, turns out to coincide with a now culturally acceptable soft postmodernism?¹⁰

Doubtless I am again overstating as regards Professor Johnson’s own intentions. But again, the rhetoric has consequences. Having adopted a

⁹ John Henry Newman, “Mysteries in Religion,” in *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 361.

¹⁰ “Soft” in the meritorious sense that it resists following the logic of postmodernism to its violent conclusion, in which there can be only more or less regulated warfare between different ways of imagining the world. For a critique of postmodernism, see David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), part 1. An Orthodox with an uncommonly generous attitude to the Western Christian tradition, Hart offers much in this book that could be brought fruitfully to bear on questions of biblical interpretation, if those questions are framed at a properly theological and metaphysical level.

postmodernist stance, is it really possible to indwell the scriptural world? Despite its anti-metaphysical pretensions, does not postmodernism already carry with it its own construal of the world as a “darkling plain, where ignorant armies clash by night”? Can we genuinely *live* in a world that we regard as an imaginary construct that we are to *make* real? Or are we not as postmodernists always already living somewhere else, in the implied empty space from which we look out upon the scriptural world and decide to live “as though” it were real? Will the postmodernist starting point therefore not inevitably *perpetuate* “the greatest difficulty our generation has in doing theology . . . our distance from the imaginative world of Scripture” (122)?

Another closely related critical point needs to be made. As mentioned at the beginning, the authors define their Catholic approach against what they take to be a *single* other, made up indiscriminately of Protestantism and historical-critical rationalism. That they would see things in this way is rendered immediately understandable by Professor Johnson’s insightful description of American Catholic biblical scholars as “immigrants” to a “world of scholarship previously inhabited by Protestants” (11). Catholic scholars entering into the mainline biblical disciplines, first after *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, and then in increasing numbers after Vatican II, would of *course* feel themselves to be in a “Protestant” world, where issues were framed and professional identity defined in terms of three centuries of conflict over historical criticism in the Protestant communions. Nevertheless, by thus collapsing Protestantism into modernism, the authors fail, I believe, to describe clearly the cultural politics out of which the present situation in biblical studies has emerged, and therefore have not assessed quite accurately the strategic situation in which theology, including biblical scholarship, finds itself today.

The authors tell the story of the relationship between Protestantism and historical criticism exactly as Protestant historical critics have liked to tell it; it is the *winners’* version, the story as told by the modernist victors in the great Protestant ecclesiastical and academic battles over the Bible. In that narrative, there is a straight line between Luther and, say, Wellhausen or Bultmann. Released from ecclesiastical tyranny, the study of the Bible was liberated to become *Wissenschaft*; and the *sola scriptura* mandates that such “scientific” study of the biblical texts become the basis for a reconstruction of the Christian religion to which, in principle, no limits can be set. The plausibility of this picture depends, however, upon resolutely ignoring the period between the Reformation and the Enlightenment, and in particular ignoring the biblical interpretation of that period, which is, in fact, hardly ever studied, particularly from a theo-

logical angle of interest. One could not tell from reading most standard histories, for example, that one of the most significant biblical scholars in Germany at the beginning of the eighteenth century was the Pietist August Herman Francke (1662–1727), who combined philological expertise with the lifelong hermeneutical project of a unified Christocentric reading of the whole Bible, not only in the dogmatic mode promoted by confessional controversy, but also as a spiritually transformative enterprise.¹¹

My point here is neither to defend nor to commend precritical Protestant exegesis, though I do consider it a shame that it has been allowed to fall so completely down the memory hole. The point is rather that by accepting the standard narrative, Johnson and Kurz have not seen clearly enough that historical-critical biblical scholarship, as it exists today, is not simply a Protestant phenomenon, but a synthesis of Protestant motifs with something else, with the *secularism* that arose in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a reaction to a lamentable *joint* “achievement” of Catholics and Protestants, the physical and moral devastation of Europe by the wars of religion. Secularism, as John Milbank and others have described it, was the cultural and political construction of a world in which Christianity was defined as “religion,” inward and private, and thus banished from the public realm, where it was deemed to have proven itself incurably destructive.¹² Such a project could not succeed without breaking down the precritical tradition of scriptural exegesis in which Scripture was read, in Ephraim Radner’s terms, as “the providential exponent of the world’s divine order.”¹³

The modern secularity project was not a demonic upsurge of incomprehensible hostility to the faith; it was in large measure the attempt of

¹¹ See August Herman Francke, *Schriften und Predigten, Band 4: Schriften zur biblischen Hermeneutik I*, ed. Erhard Peschke (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003). For insightful reflection on early-modern Anglican exegesis, see Ephraim Radner, *Hope among the Fragments: The Broken Church and its Engagement with Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004), 79–108.

¹² See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell’s, 1990). This book is the classic description of secular rationality as a deliberate cultural construct, though Milbank tends to reduce history to the history of ideas and thus misses the crucial relationship between the public fact of ecclesial schism and the rise of modern secularism, presenting the latter as though it were simply an organic outgrowth of late medieval voluntarism. On the way in which this problem plays out in Milbank’s very problematic constructive proposals, see R. R. Reno, “The Radical Orthodoxy Project,” in idem, *In the Ruins of the Church: Sustaining Faith in an Age of Diminished Certitude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), 63–79.

¹³ Radner, *Hope among the Fragments*, 103.

decent minds to cope with the chaos public Christianity had wrought in the wake of the Reformation. The incapacity of Christians to live together in charity in the biblical world subverted the cultural plausibility of that world and motivated the urgency with which the secularist project strove to get the Bible under control.¹⁴ Indeed, precisely in order to liberate their faith from complicity in violence and murder, *Christians* of all ecclesiastical parties took part in the establishment of the secular culture, in which “religion” would be private, and secular rationality firmly in charge of the public square. The historical-critical movement cannot be understood apart from its ideological roots in secularist thinkers like Hobbes and Spinoza, but scholars in the churches (mostly, but not only, Protestants) took up both the critical challenge and much of the ideological motivation of these great skeptics in the interests of producing a “purified” Christianity, that is, one that limited its claims to the proper sphere of “religion,” the moral and spiritual life of the inner person.¹⁵

The pertinence of these remarks to the hermeneutical enterprise of Professors Johnson and Kurz is twofold. First, I would suggest that we cannot re-enter the scriptural world from which we are all in various

¹⁴ This motivation is placed squarely on the table by Spinoza in chapter 7 of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*: “Ambition and unscrupulousness have waxed so powerful, that religion is thought to consist, not so much in respecting the writings of the Holy Ghost, as in defending human commentaries, so that religion is no longer identified with charity, but with spreading discord and propagating insensate hatred disguised under the name of zeal for the Lord, and eager ardor.” Trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover Books, 1951). Such terms appearing in 1670 have very specific and bloody referents.

¹⁵ On the Catholic side, while Richard Simon’s motivations continue to be controversial, his work and its reception cannot be understood except in the political-religious context of the late seventeenth century. Some of the issues about Simon are raised and a sense of his context is communicated by Justin I. A. Champion, “‘Acceptable to inquisitive men’: Some Simonian contexts for Newton’s Biblical Criticism, 1680–1692” (www.rhbnc.ac.uk/~uhra026/simon1.html), and idem, “Pere Richard Simon and English Biblical Criticism, 1680–1700” (www.rhbnc.ac.uk/~uhra026/simon2.html). Though Professor Johnson is rather dismissive of the role of Spinoza and Simon (15, note 16), they were in fact important influences on the German developments to which he points. For example, Simon’s *Histoire Critique* was published in German in 1776, with preface and notes by Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791), among the most significant figures in the rise of German historical criticism. Spinoza too had a profound influence in Germany, especially by way of the notorious Pantheism Controversy of the 1780s. Spinoza’s apparent influence on Lessing is testimony enough to his importance for the development of German Protestant biblical scholarship, given Lessing’s immense role in framing the questions that dominated (and in some ways still dominate) that scholarly tradition.

ways estranged without facing head-on the issue of secularism. Bluntly put, are we ready to reckon straightforwardly with divine providence as a factor shaping the real world, just as surely as we reckon with the law of supply and demand or the force of gravity? As a recent study by R. R. Reno and John J. O’Keefe makes abundantly clear,¹⁶ faith in divine providence is at the heart of the classical Christian engagement with Scripture, that one providence that has enfolded the whole world in an “*oikonomia* for the fullness of the times, to recapitulate all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10), and has likewise designed in the literary “economy” of the scriptural canon an unsurpassably rich representation of the Christologically centered order of reality. Thus St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who laid out more clearly than anyone else in the patristic period the theological contours of the common Christian exegetical tradition, writes:

Anyone who reads the Scriptures with attention will find in them a discourse about Christ, and a prefiguration of the new calling.¹⁷ For Christ is “the treasure hidden in the field” (Mt 13:44), that is, in this world (for “the field is the world,” Mt 13:38), but he is also hidden in the Scriptures, since he was signified by types and parables which could not be understood, humanly speaking, before the consummation of those things which were prophesied as coming, that is, the advent of Christ.¹⁸

St. Irenaeus here captures precisely the understanding of the relationship between Scripture and reality that is operative in the whole premodern Christian theological tradition. Christ is the treasure hidden in the world, the world’s secret meaning, the one in whom God intends in the mystery of his will to “recapitulate all things.” That world-ordering “economy” is mirrored and revealed in the complex literary economy of Holy Scripture, in the providentially designed interconnections of the whole with the parts and of the parts with one another as they converge on the *skopos*, Jesus Christ, the one toward whom both Scripture and reality move.

Professor Johnson describes quite clearly the theological premises that led Christians of the past to treat the Bible as an utterly singular book, taking its divine authorship as a reality with which interpreters must reckon in very concrete and practical ways (47–60). But in his subsequent reflection on these premises (60–63), he does not really address their challenge as truth-claims, as assertions about what is the case. By taking the

¹⁶ John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2005).

¹⁷ That is, of the gentiles.

¹⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, 26, 1.

postmodernist route, he effectually transforms these premises into imaginative possibilities rather than claims about the real world. Ever since Auerbach, however, it has been a commonplace of the literary study of the Bible that the Scriptures do *not* present their world to us as simply an imaginative possibility: “The Scripture stories do not, like Homer’s, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us—they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels.”¹⁹

I do not therefore believe that there is any way to ease ourselves into the scriptural world by a postmodernist side door; one does not enter that world by deciding to act “as though” it were real, but rather by acknowledging the hand and voice of God in particular present, public phenomena. Catholics and Lutherans, at least, are familiar with the idea of acknowledging God’s public “real presence” in worship, but we need to think through more explicitly what would be involved, and how drastic a break with the scholarly norms of our public culture would be required, were we to approach Scripture with the Fathers as a divinely authored book.²⁰

The other issue raised by my remarks on secularism has to do with Christian unity. The inability of European Christians to live together in peace within the scriptural world was the most potent factor that brought the Bible into public discredit in the early modern period. I would suggest that we will not overcome our estrangement from the Scriptures until we find them gathering us together from our divisions into unity in Christ—until we submit to the power of the Holy Spirit who strives through the Scriptures to bring us all into communion under the rule of the one Christ. Scripture must reassert its power to order the world at the point at which it once lost that power, by and through the reconciliation of Christians under one Lord in one shared scriptural world.

No more than anyone else can I offer a “roadmap” to Christian unity. I am convinced however that if we define ourselves contrastively right from the start, if we accept our divisions as one of the premises of our enterprise, and so construe the theological-exegetical task that our own

¹⁹ Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 15.

²⁰ Writing in a Thomist journal, I should perhaps say that while there is certainly a metaphysical aspect of the encounter with secularism, it cannot stand alone. Indeed, it may be that the loss of a “scriptural mind” in the modern Church is one of the reasons Thomist philosophy has not had the culture-transforming effects at which it has aimed. Philosophical refutations of secularism do not by themselves teach people how to live in a non-secular universe; in the Christian tradition, the latter was precisely the task of scriptural interpretation.

identities and “sensibilities” are protected from disturbance, we will not find our way into the real world that Scripture sets before us. I do not, let me repeat, advocate compromises of truth; but though the truth is not up for grabs, *we ourselves* must be ready to die to our present “identities” if we are to inhabit the scriptural universe where Christ is Lord. I suspect therefore that entering again into the scriptural world will involve for us far greater humiliation, the experience of a far greater disorientation, the confession of a far more profound ignorance, than anything postmodernism is equipped to imagine. It will not be a matter of deciding to make the scriptural world real, but rather a realization in the presence of the scriptural Christ that we are not only blind, but *unreal*—like the shades in C. S. Lewis’s *Great Divorce*, who find that even on the distant outskirts of the City of God, the very grass underfoot is so much more solid than they that it hurts their feet to walk upon it.

What Christian unity would look like, what we ourselves would look like as inhabitants of a shared scriptural universe, is impossible to say in advance of arrival. But the starting point and road forward have been pointed out with great clarity by the Holy Father, in words that have the greatest relevance to the necessary reformation (if I may be permitted the word) of theology and the study of Scripture alike:

All of us who are Christ’s followers must therefore meet and unite around him. . . . We can and must immediately reach and display to the world our unity in proclaiming the mystery of Christ, in revealing the divine dimension and also the human dimension of the Redemption, and in struggling with unwearying perseverance for the dignity that each human being has reached and can continually reach in Christ.²¹

Due to limitations of space, I have not been able to balance my criticisms with due appreciation of the many excellent features of this book. I should not however like to leave unmentioned Professor Johnson’s forthright and cogent critique of contemporary “establishment” biblical studies, Professor Kurz’s illuminating readings of the Gospel of John, and the example both authors set of amicable discourse within a shared scriptural universe on the part of two rather different Roman Catholics—an ecumenical achievement in its own right. Despite my criticisms, Professors Johnson and Kurz are moving the conversation about biblical interpretation in the right direction, and for that they deserve our thanks. **N V**

²¹ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 11.

Conversation, Conversion, and Construction

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IT IS IN A SPIRIT of gratitude that I respond to the five essays that colleagues have written as part of the constructive conversation concerning the future of Catholic biblical scholarship. Bill Kurz and I recognize that the efforts of Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering have already played a significant role in making our book a part of this conversation. We are grateful for this issue of *Nova et Vetera* dedicated to the topic, as well as for the lengthy and positive review by Jody Vaccaro Lewis already published in its pages.

The experience of this symposium also recalls for me the colloquium on the book that Thomas Levergood and the Lumen Christi Institute organized at the University of Chicago Divinity School on April 26, 2003. At that session, Bill and I had a chance to “extend and amend” the positions we had taken in the book, and heard vigorous responses from Gary Anderson, Carolyn Osiek, and Paul Griffiths. We learned on that occasion that by no means did all Catholic scholars agree either with our diagnosis or with our proposed remedies. The lack of unanimous praise and universal plaudit dismayed us less than it might have, for the tone of that conversation was civil, and the conversation was indeed constructive. We can scarcely complain if readers actually respond with what we said we wanted!

The same sense of gratitude extends to the work of the five colleagues who wrote essays for this journal. We understand the generosity it requires to enter into projects other than one’s own, and are impressed by the energy and seriousness of the essays. Not only do they raise important issues, they do so in the same spirit of collegial conversation that we had hoped would mark this entire enterprise. Some respondents (as well as reviewers) have noted the ways in which Bill and I differ on significant points, if not in substance, surely in emphasis and style. This is no surprise to either of us, for we have genially been disagreeing in perfect amity for many years. Indeed, we both regard such pluralism of perspective—within an even deeper commitment to common faith and practice—to be thoroughly catholic in character.

Equally important, we do not regard our individual or common “correctness” to be at all the point. The point is rather the cultivation of a conversation that will bear fruit for the passionate and prophetic reading of God’s Word within the church and for the world. Bill and I have

not, therefore, consulted or collaborated in our essays of response, and may, characteristically, go in several different directions. I will respond individually to the essays in the order in which they reached me (this is the “conversation” part of my title), and then add some thoughts on “conversion and construction.”

The Text of the Bible and Catholic Biblical Scholarship

Stephen D. Ryan, OP, helpfully identifies four issues pertaining to the text of Scripture that present significant challenges to scholarship within the church. Three of the issues touch on the question of what we actually regard as Scripture. What is the status of the Septuagint, of multiple editions of the same book, of the early versions? If biblical scholarship were simply something carried out in the academy, these complexities would only represent the delights of literary and historical study. The scholar can embrace them all. But if biblical scholarship is in and for and by the church, then difficult decisions must be made, and these decisions are of an ecclesial and theological character, rather than of a literary and historical character.

Ryan is certainly on the right track when he suggests that the fundamental ecclesial decision is made at the level of canonization, and that what is canonized is a book rather than a form of the text. He is also surely correct that inspiration must be connected to the work of the Holy Spirit in the entire process of composition, tradition, and reading, rather than in the production of a single, putatively original, form of the text—and that the plurality of texts and versions help the church avoid “enlightenment forms of biblical literalism.” And it is impossible not to agree that maintaining a role for early biblical versions safeguards the ecumenical catholicity of the church, enabling it to sustain conversation across the centuries with earlier saints and scholars.

Still, even more discernment is necessary, and it is my hope that Catholic scholars will be able to encourage and participate positively in these properly ecclesial and theological conversations. Most important, I think, is the question of the status of the Septuagint in the life of the church. Should it be regarded simply as another version? Here, the use of the Septuagint by the New Testament, and by one continuous tradition within Christianity (Orthodoxy), would seem to give it special status. Ryan’s report on the complexity of the Old Testament textual history only makes the issue more urgent. It is, moreover, a question that cannot be settled by textual critics as such, for the issues are not merely textual, but are ecclesial and theological.

The issue, after all, is not simply whether Christians should have access to the readings of the Septuagint as a means of enrichment; it is whether the Septuagint should have first claim to be regarded as the Christian Old Testament, with the authority in ecclesial and theological debates that goes with such status. Precisely here is where a scholarship of and for the church makes a difference. I have already applauded the sentiments expressed by Ryan in his final paragraph. But I would like to make a distinction between two things that he apparently treats as one. He speaks of maintaining the versions alongside the original texts “in the liturgical and intellectual life of the church.” Concerning the last, I am in full agreement. There is every reason within the academy to keep diversity alive without discrimination, because the point of such scholarship is knowledge.

When it comes to the “liturgical,” however, we are in a realm other than the scholar’s study where parallel texts can endlessly be compared and weighed; we are in the realm of ritual performance and spiritual transformation. In this realm, a pluralism of texts may do more harm than good. This is why a decision about the scriptural status, inspiration, and authority of the Septuagint would make a profound difference, for a positive decision would (could? should?) lead logically to the use of a translation from the Septuagint for the Old Testament readings in liturgical celebrations. I do not pretend to know whether such a conclusion would be appropriate or not, but I am convinced that conversation about the grounds even of our present liturgical practice with respect to Scripture is necessary.

Such are the *quaestiones disputatae* that Ryan’s essay introduces. They are genuine questions. They should be actively discussed and disputed within a biblical scholarship concerned not only for the advancement of learning but for the theological life of the church.

“La Bible en ses Traditions”

One could scarcely imagine a response to the book more positive or generous than that offered by Olivier-Thomas Venard, OP, especially since he engages the conversation from the perspective of a project already in process. Rather than defensively state, as he might have done, “but everything you call for, we are already doing,” he has rather entered into the spirit of a collegial effort by presenting the recasting of the *Bible de Jerusalem*, in which he is involved, as a “fourth-generation enterprise,” and one that seeks truly to be a form of biblical scholarship in service to the life of the church. By so doing, he and his colleagues at the *École Biblique* truly do walk in the footsteps of their “founder and inspirer,” Père LaGrange.

There are many specific aspects of the project that deserve a full and positive response. I state here only my appreciation for the way in which

not only the “world that made the Bible” (background) finds a place in the notes, but even more, “the world that the Bible made.” The place given to the versions, to textual variants as part of the history of reception, and to moments in the interpretive tradition—in liturgy and doctrine as well as in commentaries—is impressive. Both in the design of its pages and in its contents, the project does resemble a “Christian Talmud.” It is perhaps also worth observing that the project seeks a way of honoring the multiple editions and versions and text traditions to which Ryan refers in his essay.

The sensibility brought to the translation and notes on language are also impressive. I agree that the rhetorical and poetic dimensions of the biblical text are as important to celebrate as its historical referents. And Venard’s example from his work on Matthew shows how a creative struggle with the original language not only opens up new possibilities of meaning, but also deeply suggestive intertextual connections (as in the nuances of seed/word in the Gospels of Matthew and John). I don’t know how well it will work in practice, but Venard’s vision of a collegial effort in annotation, with a main author receiving feedback and helpful leads from experts in fields other than the author’s own, is an attractive ideal.

Even as I see this project as making concrete so many of the ideas expressed in our book, I would prefer to see it as an aspect, even an important one, of a renewed Catholic biblical scholarship rather than as the full or necessary expression of that renewal. My caution is connected entirely to the fact that the *Bible de Jerusalem* is not only a book, but a long series of books, that will appear in full only after “15, 30, or 60 years.” The time lapse is not worrisome, but the monumental character of the project is. Now, given the ambitious ideals of the authors, and given the number of biblical books, and given the natural tendency of scholarship to expand, there is no avoiding the fact that the new *Bible de Jerusalem*, if carried out as Venard describes, will be a “monument.” And there are plusses and minuses attached to all such monuments.

On the positive side, a monumental publication embodies in an impressive form the values to which it ascribes; there can be no mistaking a commitment to the history of interpretation when it forms such a prominent feature of a multi-volume work. Such a sprawling publication can also provide a fine framework for the study of others, placing at the disposal of less learned readers the riches of scholarly research, in a format that emphasizes the reciprocal and dialogical relationship among the original text and the reception of it in the church. As such, the work can serve to invite others into the conversation that it enables. On the negative side, such monumental ventures, simply because of their size and

impressive erudition, might be taken as having already accomplished the interpretive conversation and packaged it for readers. It is very difficult to break out of the package, once it has been completed. Similarly, anthologies devoted to “Rabbinic Tradition” and “Patristic Thought” both have the same liability: They can seduce those who do not know such traditions firsthand into thinking that they have actually engaged those realms, when in fact they have only been exposed to a small portion of it, not on its own terms, but as selected by the biblical passage under discussion.

Despite the limitations and dangers of a publication so monumental, it deserves recognition and support, not only for the values it espouses and seeks to realize, but because the process of writing and publication devoted to such values will itself have a transforming effect on the scholars who are involved, and a transforming effect on their students, and through them have the possibility of transforming the church.

A Future of Balance and Proportion

Frank J. Matera embraces the theme of “both/and” in Catholic biblical scholarship and develops it according to four topics. By so doing, he illustrates precisely the very balance and proportion that we would all like to consider a distinctively, if by no means uniquely, Catholic sensibility. Before responding to his major observations, with which I substantially agree, I want briefly to address the possible implications of two opening statements. First, he suggests that Bill and I each had “a single formula” with which to address the present situation. I would resist that characterization, as I think Bill would as well. Certainly I do not think that engagement with patristic and medieval interpreters is alone sufficient or can stand apart from all the other dimensions of recovering a scriptural imagination that I sketch in my first and fifth chapter. Second, Father Matera says that his social location within a Catholic University may make him naïve as to what is happening elsewhere and “more sanguine about the present situation of Catholic biblical scholarship.” I can see ways in which that can be so, but I caution against an inference that working within a Catholic university automatically ensures the sort of balance and proportion in scholarship that he advocates.

Each of Father Matera’s categories opens an important and difficult arena of conversation, none more difficult or important than the relation between history and theology, both in general and with respect to the interpretation of Scripture. It is a topic too vast and complex to take on in this brief response. But briefly, I agree that an understanding of the historical circumstances giving rise to texts can be important, and in

general subscribe to the proposition that the more history we know the better and more responsible readers we can be. There is, to be sure, an important distinction between doing history in order better to understand and engage the texts, and manipulating the texts in order to do history. This is the bone I picked with the quest for the historical Jesus, which in some versions was content to deconstruct the Gospel compositions in order to reconstruct Jesus. Although I recognize the value of “historical correction and clarification,” I think it would be an exaggeration to say that it is always sufficient or helpful.

Rightly, then, Father Matera puts the theological element in the texts in balance with the historical. As he points out, there is not much history in the Gospel infancy accounts, but there is much theology. Here again, though, we must also recognize that there are cases when the “theology” of a text itself needs to be challenged. But most of all, I want to issue the reminder that between history and theology is the literary texture, the rhetoric of the text itself. The failure to take the New Testament writings seriously enough as literary compositions, and to engage them at that level, has tended to distort the doing both of history and theology.

The relationship between the “theologies” and “theology of the Bible” is equally vexed. I agree with Matera that contemporary scholars have done a better job of describing the “theological voice” (my own phrase) of the respective biblical compositions than they have at addressing the ways in which those voices join in a unified chorus. To describe the theological voice—or worse, the “theology,” as if it were a set thing[±] of a specific writing, however, is not yet necessarily to engage that voice theologically, to struggle not only with its meaning but also with its claims to truth. Biblical scholars have largely resisted that task, preferring the more modest exercise of description. It is not entirely clear, moreover, how the descriptive exercise can move to that more dialogical (even agonistic) one. This is the real, and as yet largely unmet, challenge to those of us who wish to read Scripture theologically.

It is in this light that I am also cautious concerning the “theology of the New Testament” or “theology of the Bible.” My remarks here anticipate my response to Professor Hays below. I like Father Matera’s formulation, “Searching for the unity of Scripture is another way of searching for God.” Exactly. But just as the search for God is not a matter of tying all the elements of the world together in a final and satisfying whole, but is rather a process of engaging each dimension of the world that is thematically given while at the deepest level also responding to the one who is never thematically available as the world is, so the quest for the unity of Scripture is best carried out, I think, athematically, or extra-thematically.

I agree, therefore, that one extreme to be avoided is the fragmentation of Scripture into a loose assemblage of ancient writings that are read, each one, only with reference to their original historical settings. But I ask whether we need to construct and make explicit the ways in which all these writings, gathered into a single collection through canonization, can converse with each other, and with all the centuries of their readers, in a single, complex conversation that is, from beginning to end, revelatory. Does the effort to fix those points of unity—especially when it is done in books—not tend inevitably to suppress elements of diversity within the voices, and worse, render static what works best precisely as a dynamic element in canonical reading?

Father Matera correctly notes that the question of the relation of Old Testament to the New is analogous to the question of theologies/theology. He is further correct in noting that the question of the Christian Bible is made more acute by the ecumenical recognition of the Hebrew Bible as the Scripture of the Jewish people. On this question, I want to make only three brief points. First, as with the question of “New Testament Theology,” I consider the best approach to be not through the construction of a single systematic biblical theology but through enabling and enlivening the multiple and complex conversations that can take place among all the compositions of Scripture. The model for such conversation, in fact, is found in creative preaching on lectionary texts. Second, the question of the unity of the Scriptures and the character of the “Christian Bible” once more presses us to consider the role of the Septuagint as the Christian Old Testament. Third, as an example of “balance and proportion,” the consideration of the two testaments must give due consideration both to the compositional voice of the respective Old Testament texts in the own right, and to the ways in which the appropriation of those texts by the New Testament represents for Christians a privileged though not exhaustive reading of them.

With regard to Matera’s final category, the balance is far easier to state than it is to realize. The kind of deep loyalty and critical engagement that I think should characterize an ecclesial biblical scholarship has to resist, on one side, an anti-intellectualism and suspicion of scholarship among many in the church, including some leaders, and on the other side, an academic environment that sometimes holds itself aloof from the concerns of faith communities, and sometimes is even hostile to those concerns. At the same time, those seeking that middle ground of critical loyalty must acknowledge the partial validity of the extreme positions. They recognize that not every reading of Scripture must be mediated through experts, and that experts have often done little to nurture the life

of faith, even as they also recognize that the life of the mind can legitimately have disinterested moments and that not all learning needs to have an immediately obvious pragmatic or pastoral yield. I will try to say a few more words on this subject in my closing subject, but I want to basically agree with Matera that the balance (which may be collegial and reciprocal rather than necessarily located in each scholar at every moment) is the ideal, however difficult it is to achieve.

Re-Entering the Scriptural World

Some considerable delicacy is required in my response to the essays so generously contributed by two Protestant colleagues, just as considerable delicacy was required of them to make those contributions to a conversation that was from the beginning a call to Catholics to consider what they were about when they studied Scripture. Both Professor David S. Yeago and Professor Richard B. Hays say positive things about the book, for which I am grateful. Perhaps understandably, they are also more critical in their review of our efforts. And to some extent, they touch on the same or very similar points. Some of my response to Yeago, therefore, will also serve as a response to Hays.

Although Bill also used some of the same language, I clearly am the main target for both reviewers' criticism of what they regard as a polarizing Protestant/Catholic language. My rhetoric is regarded as hostile, inaccurate, and an affront to a proper ecumenical spirit. Some time spent examining if not salving this sore spot may therefore be appropriate.

First, let me hasten to admit that this sort of rhetoric, which as Professor Yeago notes, has as its goal a certain identity formation, always involves, as Hays observes, a certain amount of stereotyping. I am as aware as my colleagues that Luther and Calvin read Scripture within a theological framework very different than that of David Strauss and F. C. Baur. And I know, as they do, that the difference was the way in which enlightenment principles were at work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in a way they were not in the sixteenth century. I am aware that Wesley and Pietists had strong doctrines of sanctification. So let me take their respective corrections concerning overstatement and oversimplification as read.

But having acknowledged the oversimplification of my language, I want to point out that the intention of the contrast I drew was to have Catholic biblical scholars look to what precious aspects of their own tradition they may have too quickly abandoned, rather than to criticize Protestant scholars for being consistent with their own theological principles. Professor Yeago can object to the strategy of identification by

contrast, but in the present case, I not only think it was appropriate, I find it hard to conceive how else the necessary points could be made.

Although I agree, furthermore, that the historical-critical approach was, from the nineteenth century forward, a quintessential project of modernity, driven by enlightenment premises, I do not think it a caricature (to use Professor Hays's term) to observe that a not inconsiderable amount of Protestant theology—in particular the Protestant theology most comfortable with critical biblical scholarship—over this same span of time was equally affected by modernity. E. Brooks Holifield has masterfully demonstrated the point in his *Theology in America* (Yale University Press, 2003). Within critical NT scholarship, it is not inaccurate to observe that an insistence on the literal sense rather than the figurative, a consistent application of *sachkritik*—not least with regard to those writings thought to be “catholic” in their tendencies, and a privileging of origins over development, are not derived so much from enlightenment historiography as from specifically Protestant convictions.

By no means am I the first to point this out. In the book, I make reference to two Jewish scholars, Jon Levenson and Jonathan Z. Smith, who have explicitly spoken of “protestant presuppositions” within critical biblical scholarship, as a way of locating a preoccupation with history as the vehicle of theology on one side (Levenson), and a privileging of origins over development on the other (Smith). Such designations, furthermore, are not a matter of bias. They are derived from Protestant scholars themselves. In his *Drudgery Divine* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), Smith massively documented the use of the phrase “pagano-papism” by Protestant scholars. A superficial survey would quickly show how even recent Protestant theologians such as Paul Tillich could use the phrase “Protestant Principle” precisely as an instrument to reject tendencies regarded as specifically Roman Catholic (see, e.g., Tillich, *Systematic Theology* I, 37, 227; III, 176).

If Professors Yeago and Hays are (understandably) sensitive to Protestant scholarship being made to appear as a foil for the positive presentation of a Catholic scholarship, I would ask them to place themselves in the position of Roman Catholic scholars who have, from their first initiation into critical New Testament scholarship, been schooled to regard development as a decline from the truth of the Gospel, if not its actual distortion, and to regard “early Catholicism” as the best way to characterize such development. The reason I quoted Hans von Campenhausen on this point in the book (20, note 21) is that he was the first author Bill and I were assigned to read in our first month of Ph.D. study at Yale.

In short, if I stipulate that my rhetorical rendering of the Protestant principles in historical-critical scholarship is lacking nuance, I would ask

whether Professor Yeago would be willing to stipulate that it does not, in fact, lack substance. Further, I would ask whether Protestant biblical scholars might not usefully engage in a similar exercise to the one Bill and I have suggested for Catholic scholars: If the privileging of origins—to take one example—is not intrinsic to Protestant Christianity, then it can be asked why it has played such a key role; if it is intrinsic and even essential to the Protestant way of being Christian, then ought it not to be embraced and celebrated, as this tradition's distinctive gift within a broader ecumenical conversation?

Having spent so much space on this question, I must too briefly respond to a number of other provocative and important points raised by Professor Yeago. On the issue of ecumenism, I have reread my statements on this carefully, and think they represent exactly my position as well as my disposition. I also stand by the substantial accuracy of my statement that a Catholic “cannot find in Paul’s language about justification by faith the same depth of significance that Lutheran scholars do. Reformed readers cannot appreciate Paul’s language about sanctification in the same manner as Catholics.” Professor Yeago refers to official ecumenical treaties. I am talking about deep cultural realities. Is my statement prescriptive? No. Is it descriptively accurate? I think so, and have had that view strengthened over and over in (ecumenically populated) doctoral seminars on Pauline letters, as well as in Bible study sessions (more than I can remember) in Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist congregations.

Finally, Professor Yeago poses two interrelated questions concerning my phrase “imagining the world that Scripture imagines.” With Professor Hays, he wonders whether I inhabit that world or not. Intellectual honesty requires me to respond that I don’t, certainly not in the manner that patristic and medieval interpreters inhabited it, or in the manner I once inhabited it when I was a very young Benedictine monk. Like all my colleagues, I have passed through and am still tremendously influenced by modernity. To be postmodern in the sense I have used the term—not as a personal affectation but as a cultural condition—requires having been modern in some fashion. Do I wish to imagine that world and dwell within it? The best part of me does, and seeks to embody that world in action. Do large parts of my life not succeed in that endeavor? Yes, on one side because of sin, and on the other side because of the ways in which I am aware of multiple ways of imagining the world and collude, knowingly or not, in their construction as well.

Professor Yeago also worries that speaking of “the world Scripture imagines” might be taken to mean an “imaginary world.” He makes the valuable point that Scripture claims that its construal of the world is real

and true, and that Christians also take up a public position in the world by their profession of faith that derives from that construal. I agree, and make an extended argument to that effect in my book, *The Creed: What Christian Believe and Why it Matters* (Doubleday, 2003). Furthermore, I regard the argument in my book on the creed and the statements I have made about the world that Scripture imagines as complementary rather than contradictory.

The Future of Christian Biblical Scholarship

My response to Professor Richard Hays will be relatively short because, as I noted above, he has identified some of the same issues as were raised by Professor Yeago. I am pleased that Hays likes a number of our proposals and even some of our diagnosis. I am delighted that he recalls the names of Brevard Childs, Hans Frei, Francis Watson, Stephen Fowl, David Steinmetz, and the members of the Scripture project with which he is involved (and which included three Roman Catholics) as a reminder that Bill Kurz and I are not—just in case we were tempted so to characterize ourselves—“lonely voices in the wilderness,” but speak in chorus with “an impressive cloud of witnesses” who form a “widespread reforming movement in biblical studies.” I gladly acknowledge that the footnote (129, note 19) that caused him pain was more accurate with respect to its main referents, Caird and Hurst, than it was with respect to his *Moral Vision of the New Testament*.

In my previous response to Yeago, I have tried to address what Hays calls an “unnecessarily uncharitable” and “antagonistic stance” toward Protestant interpreters, as well as the question of whether I really inhabited “the world imagined by Scripture,” and whether I knew there was a difference between the scriptural sensibility of the great reformers and the tendencies of enlightenment scholars who happened also to be Protestant. There is no need, I think, to address the obvious fact that Bill and I, although both Roman Catholic, have different perspectives and emphases, since we have cheerfully acknowledged this, both in the form and the substance of our conversation. I will leave aside entirely as deeply uninteresting to anybody but old Yalies a discussion of whether I have failed in piety toward my alma mater. This leaves two substantial objections to things I said in the book—I will leave to Bill a response to any statements made about his contributions.

The first substantial issue is biblical theology. I have already touched on this point in my response to Father Matera. I think it is important to distinguish three distinct exercises, which are frequently, and unfortunately, lumped together under the rubric “biblical theology.” One is the description of and (too seldom) engagement with the “theological voice”

of the respective biblical compositions. I not only think this is important, I have actually done more than a little of it. I think this is what Augustine did in his homilies on the First Letter of John and what Childs did in his commentary on Isaiah. Another is the use of Scripture in the doing of theology within the church. This also is legitimate and necessary. I have also done some of this. In this exercise the point is less the meaning of the text than it is the meaning of the mystery of faith. This is what Augustine did in his anti-Pelagian tractates or in *De Trinitate*. In distinct ways, both Professor Hays and I have done some of this.

I therefore have no issues with these two enterprises, except concerning whether they are done well and with integrity. I do have some questions about how the first exercise might aid or hinder the second, but that is another discussion. And I resist calling them “biblical theology” because of the way in which that term has been connected to the third exercise. My criticism is directed solely to the distinct intellectual exercise that grew up precisely within the frame of the enlightenment and has called itself since the time of Philip Gabler “New Testament Theology.” As embodied by books with that title (including those by Brevard Childs), this exercise suffers from the faults I have attributed to it, and should be abandoned, precisely in the name of theology and the theological engagement with Scripture.

The second issue is the role of experience in interpreting Scripture. I should mention immediately that my stress on this element owes not a little to my own immersion in a Methodist context at Candler School of Theology. I have found the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to be a wonderful explication of hermeneutical principles that are deeply consonant with Catholic sensibilities. I should also note that my emphasis is not on experience of any sort but on the experience of the living God, and that I have derived this emphasis, not from some philosophical or ideological position, but from the careful reading of the New Testament. Since Hays refers to my book *Scripture and Discernment*, he must also know that I fully acknowledge there the difficulties that accompany taking religious experience seriously, and that I devote considerable attention to the question of criteria for discernment. By no means can the church say yes to everything claimed to be an experience of God. The church must say yes only to what builds it in holiness. As Hays notes, moreover, my call for attention to the experience of the living God in the fabric of human existence goes together with a call for close and disciplined practices of reading within communities. This is far from a call for subjectivity or individualism. Perhaps what Hays cannot grasp is the way in which Roman Catholic

scholars always assume (and find no need constantly to reaffirm) the presence of the magisterial teaching function, the formal practices of liturgy, the framework of the canon, the profession of the creed, the practices of piety, the witness of the saints, the entire weight of tradition, as realities that are massively given, and constantly serving as checks and balances to excessive subjectivity.

It is, in fact, important to appreciate the experiential element in interpretation from a perspective other than that of the problematic. God's Holy Spirit, after all, works at every moment in human experience for growth in holiness and wisdom. Without the witness of the saints—a witness that is always based in their experience—the church does not grow in the understanding of Scripture that is, in the most proper sense, sapiential.

Conversion and Construction

As grateful as I am for this continuation of “conversation,” I want to conclude this response by reminding my colleagues as well as myself that the process of scholars talking among themselves, however enjoyable and even profitable, is not by itself sufficient to enliven a future Catholic biblical scholarship. Insofar as such conversation stays at the level of theory and position-taking, in fact, it can come dangerously close to an academic exercise that serves its own ends but does not necessarily build the church. If the participants agree on most of the positive ideals that the authors have identified in their book, the question arises how those ideals might find embodiment and not merely intellectual agreement. It is my conviction that those of us who espouse these convictions need to engage a process of conversion and construction, or, to use other terms, to apply ourselves seriously to the politics and pedagogy of scholarship.

By conversion, I mean precisely the turn from theory to practice, and within the academy and the church, practice always involves politics. Those of us in major graduate programs, for example, are in a position to fundamentally affect the way Scripture is read in the church, first through our education of ministers, and second, through our training of professors. If values are going to find embodiment, then hard curricular debates and decisions must be made. It will not be enough to gather at conferences and workshops with like-minded folks, we must engage and try to persuade colleagues in specific institutions whose views do not line up with ours. In ministerial programs, how much Scripture should be studied, and how does such study serve to enrich the theological imagination of the pastor? In Ph.D. programs, what role shall be given to the history of interpretation, both at the level of seminars and as a necessary aspect of dissertations? How much shall we encourage, as part of our enterprise,

scholarship that is explicitly theological and ecclesial?

By construction, I mean pedagogy, which is closely connected to politics. Curricular decisions, after all, are, or ought to be pedagogical in character. But there is also a politics embedded in the specific pedagogy of a course. Again we might ask how our manner of teaching the New Testament in seminary provides students with a living laboratory of ecclesial practice. And in our training teaching associates in Ph.D. programs, we can similarly ask how the forms of pedagogy that we communicate both explicitly and implicitly embody the values that we espouse verbally.

It is fairly easy to criticize the manner in which others have exercised their scholarship, and also fairly easy to imagine a utopian alternative. The hard work comes in the way in which we must change and work for change with others, if we want that alternative to become real. **N V**

Response to the Respondents

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² *Ibid.*, 124.

³ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

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

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

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

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

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

⁶ Ibid., 141.

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

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

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

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

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

⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁹ Ibid., 146.

¹⁰ Ibid., 147, esp. 148.

¹¹ Ibid., 151.

¹² Ibid., 152.

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

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

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

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

¹³ *Dei Verbum*, no. 2; Venard, 154.

¹⁴ Venard, 155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁹ See note 16 above.

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

²¹ John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁷ Venard, 144.

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

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

Questions remain about how one can live in a scriptural universe in the twenty-first century. I continue to look to premodern exegesis in the hopes that it can reintroduce some approaches and principles that would be viable today. One productive patristic paradigm is the importance of combining both philosophical and purely rational approaches with living within a biblical worldview. Yeago has astutely remarked that in addition to the philosophical alternatives of secular versus scriptural worldviews, it is important to remember the culture-transforming effects of a scriptural mind set.³³

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

²⁸ Venard, 144.

²⁹ Ibid., 152–53.

³⁰ Ibid., 153.

³¹ Ibid., 153.

³² Ibid., 154.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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