

Pre-Gospel Traditions and Post-Critical Interpretation in Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth: Volume 2*

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THE PUBLICATION of volume 2 of *Jesus of Nazareth* continues Pope Benedict's theological and spiritual meditation on the figure of Jesus given in the Gospels.¹ Benedict makes clear that his objective in *Jesus of Nazareth* is to produce neither a historical Jesus study, nor a critical exegesis of the Gospels, nor a work of Christology proper.² Rather, he approaches the Gospels theologically as a means to encounter in the present the living reality of Jesus Christ.³ He seeks "to present the figure and the message of Jesus . . . and so to help foster the growth of a living relationship with him."⁴ Benedict's interaction with the Gospels, therefore, primarily serves a spiritually transformative end.

¹ Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007); trans. of *Jesus von Nazareth* (Città del Vaticano and Milan: Libreria Editrice Vaticana and RCS Libri S.p.A., 2007); *ibid.*, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two: Holy Week—From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011); trans. of *Jesus von Nazareth: Zweiter Teil: Vom Einzug in Jerusalem bis zur Auferstehung* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011). Benedict makes clear (1.xxiii–xxiv) that these volumes are his writings as a theologian and do not comprise part of his papal Magisterium.

² Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1.xxiv; 2.xv, 295.

³ This should not be taken to imply that projects of critical exegesis or Christology prohibit a scholar from approaching Scripture with similar goals in mind. I make this observation in order to categorize Benedict's work properly and point out his interpretive goals.

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1.xxiv; cf. 2.xvii.

For this end, Benedict declares that his work “presupposes historical-critical exegesis and makes use of its findings, but it seeks to transcend this method and to arrive at a genuinely theological interpretation of the scriptural texts.”⁵ This, Benedict argues, is the very program for Catholic biblical interpretation set forth in *Dei Verbum* §12.⁶ The conciliar text prescribes two sets of principles which should inform Catholic biblical interpretation. The first set, given in the first two paragraphs of §12, can be categorized as historical and literary. The Council directs the biblical interpreter to “look for that meaning which the sacred writer, in a determined situation and given the circumstances of his time and culture, intended to express and did in fact express, through the medium of a contemporary literary form.”⁷ Accordingly, the interpreter should seek to understand the communication of the biblical authors by situating their writings in their historical, literary, and cultural contexts of origin. The Council then prescribes a second set of interpretive principles in the third paragraph of *Dei Verbum* §12 which command “no less attention” than the first: the theological and ecclesial.⁸ The full text reads: “no less attention must be devoted to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith, if we are to derive their true meaning from the sacred texts.”⁹ These three factors—the canon, the Church’s Tradition, and analogy of faith—all arise from the beliefs and practices of the Church as a historically continuous community of interpretation.¹⁰

While *Dei Verbum* prescribes these two sets of principles for Catholic biblical interpretation, it does not offer much direction as to how they are to be integrated or what a successful integration would look like in practice. Writing in 1982, Joseph Ratzinger observed that the “peaceful juxtaposition” of both sets of principles in the conciliar text “conceals the antagonism of two basic attitudes that are diametrically opposed to one

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.295.

⁶ See *ibid.*, 2.xiv–xv. For further discussion of Benedict’s theological approach to Scripture, see William M. Wright IV, “‘A New Synthesis’: Joseph Ratzinger’s *Jesus of Nazareth*,” *Nova et Vetera* 7 (2009): 35–51.

⁷ “The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation—*Dei Verbum*” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition 1992, gen ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1992), §12 (p. 757).

⁸ *Dei Verbum*, §12 (Flannery, 758).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Benedict’s case for the role of the Church as the subject of biblical interpretation is discussed in Francis Martin, “Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, on Biblical Interpretation: Two Leading Principles,” *Nova et Vetera* 5 (2007): 285–99.

another in both origin and purpose.”¹¹ The theological and ecclesial principles, with their emphasis on the canonical whole and the harmony of Scripture with the Church’s Tradition and faith, articulate “the fundamental concept of patristic exegesis . . . [which] was unity—the unity that is Christ himself.”¹² By contrast, the goal of modern historical-critical analysis “is not first of all to unite but to distinguish: not to seek for a *pneuma* that faith knows is actively present in the whole Bible, but to ask about the many individuals who, each in his own way, have worked on this many-faceted composition.”¹³ Nevertheless, the Council affirms that, despite fundamental differences in their contexts of origin, presuppositions, reading practices, and goals, both modern biblical criticism and premodern interpretation have positive and abiding value for Catholic biblical exegesis today. The task for Catholic exegetes, as Luke Johnson reminds us, is not to settle for *either* the historical/literary *or* the theological/ecclesial, but to integrate *both* the one *and* the other.¹⁴

Consistent with the first set of historical and literary principles, Benedict wants his theological work in *Jesus of Nazareth* to be grounded in historical reality and responsible to historical reason. Accordingly, he conducts his own examination of Gospel episodes and draws on the work of specialists in biblical studies. But at the same time, Benedict consciously pushes beyond the methodological limits of modern historical criticism and explicitly involves the Church’s faith and Tradition—the second set of principles—as significant hermeneutical factors in his reading of the Gospels. In this respect, Benedict’s approach to Scripture can be legitimately categorized as “post-critical”: there is, to use Denis Farkasfalvy’s description of the category, “a genuine transcendence of the historical-critical method—a transcendence gained not by discarding or rejecting the method, but by going beyond the limits of its horizon while fully retaining those features which proved themselves valid and valuable during the ‘critical’ period.”¹⁵ Benedict does not claim to have exhaustively worked

¹¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987 [1982]), 135 (both quotations are from this page).

¹² *Ibid.*, 136.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, “What’s Catholic about Catholic Biblical Scholarship? An Opening Statement,” in Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, S.J., *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 5–8.

¹⁵ Denis Farkasfalvy, “In Search of a ‘Post-Critical’ Method of Biblical Interpretation for Catholic Theology,” *Communio* 13 (1986): 288–307, here 288. Cf. Peter Ochs, “An Introduction to Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation,” in *The Return*

out the integration of these interpretive principles called for by *Dei Verbum* §12 either in theory or in practice. Instead, he offers *Jesus of Nazareth* only as a “significant step” towards this goal, with the understanding that much theological work remains to be done.¹⁶

A particularly interesting case in *Jesus of Nazareth: Volume 2*, which displays the intersection of historical and theological interpretation and provides substance for further thinking about this topic, is Benedict’s treatment of the development of Jesus traditions in New Testament Christianity. Throughout both volumes, Benedict incorporates into his interpretation the commonplace of critical New Testament scholarship that the Gospel presentations of Jesus have been shaped by the post-resurrection faith and practices of New Testament Christians. Put differently, the words and deeds of Jesus have been mediated through early Christian teaching and tradition before being reported in the Gospels. This basic point was affirmed in the 1964 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, “On the Historicity of the Gospels” (*Sancta Mater Ecclesia*), and was subsequently incorporated into magisterial teaching in *Dei Verbum* §19. For Benedict, the reception and interpretation of the realities in Jesus’ life by New Testament Christian communities is not simply a feature of the composition history of the Gospels but a reality of great theological significance. Rather than being an impediment, this ecclesial reception and interpretation is, according to Benedict, essential for knowing the revelation of Jesus. To illustrate, I will focus on Benedict’s treatment of the institution of the Eucharist.

The Importance of Historical Reality and the Limits of Historical Knowing

The introductory comments in the chapter on the Last Supper contain some of the most methodologically significant comments in all of volume 2.¹⁷ Benedict is very explicit about the fundamental importance of historical reality for Christian faith and theology. He writes: “[E]ssential to [the New Testament message] is the fact that these events actually occurred in

to *Scripture in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation*, ed. Peter Ochs (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 3–51.

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2.xv. In his famous 1988 Erasmus Lecture, Ratzinger suggests that this project may require the work of an entire generation. See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Conflict: On the Foundations and the Itinerary of Exegesis Today” in *Opening Up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. José Granados, Carlos Granados, and Luis Sánchez-Navarro (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008 [2003]), 8.

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2.103–6.

the history of this world.”¹⁸ Foundational to Christianity are certain concrete, historical realities, such as the life of Christ, which have really taken place within the course of human events and in which God has been present and active. Put negatively, Benedict continues, “biblical faith does not recount stories as symbols of meta-historical truths; rather, it bases itself upon history that unfolded upon this earth.”¹⁹ For Benedict, a strong affirmation of the historical basis for Christian faith provides inoculation against gnosticizing interpretation, which would disregard historical reality in favor of speculation and abstraction.²⁰ With regard to the institution of the Eucharist, Benedict is unambiguous about the importance for the Church’s faith and practice of this event having really occurred in Jesus’ life: “If Jesus did *not* give his disciples bread and wine as his body and blood, then the Church’s eucharistic celebration is empty—a pious fiction and not a reality at the foundation of communion with God and among men.”²¹

While Benedict is very clear about the importance of concrete, historical realities for Christianity, he is also very careful to define the scope of what modern historical research can and cannot know about realities of the past. He rightfully observes that modern historical study can yield knowledge about the past only in degrees of probability and not in absolute certitude.²² Some historical arguments and conclusions are surely better than others, but the tentative results of historical research can never be the foundation for Christian faith—they are hypothetical and subject to continuous correction and emendation.²³ Historical research can provide neither certainty nor an adequate basis for Christian life, but revealed faith can provide both. Benedict writes, “[F]aith . . . gives us the ultimate certainty upon which we base our whole lives. . . . On this basis . . . we can serenely examine exegetical hypotheses that all too often make exaggerated claims to certainty.”²⁴ As Benedict articulates the situation, concrete historical realities are of foundational importance for Christian faith, but modern historical research is limited in what it can know about those historical realities of the past.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2.103–4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 2.104.

²⁰ Ibid., 1.xv; on the latter point, see 1.228. Cf. Wright, “New Synthesis,” 39, 53.

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2.104.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. In fact, Benedict (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 1.xvii–xviii) cites these methodological limits of modern historical study as reason for why the historical-critical method need be transcended through an integration with theological principles of interpretation (while the gains and learning produced by historical criticism are retained). See also Wright, “New Synthesis,” 41.

²⁴ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2.105.

On these matters of history and historical knowing, it is striking to note the convergences between the positions of Benedict and John Meier. In volume 1 of *A Marginal Jew*, Meier devotes a chapter to the (limited) contributions which historical Jesus research can offer Christian faith and theology. One such contribution, according to Meier, is a renewed appreciation for the historical realities at the heart of Christian faith. Instead of making Jesus into “a mythic symbol, or a timeless archetype” and Christian faith into “a vague existential attitude or a way of being in the world,” Meier argues, historical Jesus study “underlines the fact that there is specific content to Christian faith, content connected with specific persons and events in past history.”²⁵ While Christian beliefs involve certain realities of the past, Meier, like Benedict, is careful to define the limits of what modern historical study can know about them. The sparse, fragmentary nature of the evidence for much in ancient history is such that certain conclusions cannot be reached and judgments must often be qualified.²⁶ Furthermore, Meier argues that “the Jesus of history [i.e. the scholarly reconstruction of Jesus according to the standards of modern historical research] is not and cannot be the object of Christian faith.”²⁷ Reasons for this include the many different (and contradictory) scholarly reconstructions of the historical Jesus and the basic fact that the vast majority of Christians throughout history have lived lives of faith without such scholarly reconstructions.²⁸ For Christians, Meier writes, “the object of Christian faith is a living person, Jesus Christ, who fully entered into a true human existence on earth in the 1st century A.D., but who now lives, risen and glorified, forever in the Father’s presence.”²⁹ Both Meier and Benedict are in agreement about these basic matters, and each one proceeds to undertake a different kind of project with different goals. Meier’s project concerns what can be reconstructed about Jesus according to the criteria of modern historiography, whereas Benedict’s project concerns knowing the living reality of Jesus, not simply in light of historical study, but also in light of revealed faith.

With respect to the institution of the Eucharist specifically, Benedict observes that it is given in two major lines of New Testament tradition: the Pauline–Lukan tradition (cf. 1 Cor 11:23–26; Lk 22:15–20); the Markan–Matthean tradition (cf. Mk 14:22–25; Mt 26:26–29). Ratzinger relies on the exegetical scholarship of Rudolf Pesch, who argues that the

²⁵ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols., Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2010), 1.199.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.22–24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.197.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.197–98. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2.xvi.

²⁹ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.198.

Markan tradition is the older of the two and originates in the 30s—Benedict also assigns the Pauline tradition to the same decade.³⁰ Benedict appeals to 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 as evidence of this tradition's antiquity. Paul cites early Christian tradition about the Last Supper as predating himself, which he had "received from the Lord" and then "handed on" to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:23). Benedict notes that some modern scholars dispute that the institution of the Eucharist goes back to Jesus, and the objection which he cites is the perceived incompatibility of Jesus' Kingdom of God ministry with his interpretation of his impending death at the Last Supper as expiatory.³¹ Arguing that such a theological distinction is unwarranted and a temporal distinction between phases of Jesus' ministry (e.g. early Kingdom preaching vs. later interpretation of his death) cannot be neatly drawn on the basis of the Gospels' chronology, Benedict concludes that it is much more plausible to think that these traditions originate with Jesus' words and deeds at the Last Supper rather than to think that the Eucharist was a wholesale invention of early Christian communities.³²

The Ecclesial Reception and Interpretation of Biblical Realities

Having located the origins of the Eucharist in the life of Jesus, Benedict turns to the two major lines of New Testament tradition that transmit this reality. As Benedict works theologically through the New Testament material pertaining to the institution of the Eucharist, he calls attention to the relation of this material to the liturgical life of early Christian communities. With regard to 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, Benedict observes that Paul cites the words and deeds of Jesus in relation to the liturgical practices of the Corinthian community and the problems therein. Paul appeals to Jesus' words and deeds at the Last Supper as authoritative for the Corinthians' liturgical practices because he regards them as genuinely coming from Jesus.³³ Benedict also speaks of the Markan-Matthean tradition as embedded in early Christian liturgical use for which it was authoritative.³⁴

³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2.116, citing Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium: Zweiter Teil* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 364–77.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.117–25. For a survey of scholarly opinion on the origins and development of the Eucharist, see Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998 [1996]), 405–39, as noted and discussed in Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 956–68, here 963.

³² Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2.125.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.116–17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.117, 138–39.

Table 1. *The Four New Testament Accounts of the Institution of the Eucharist*

	1 Cor 11:23–26	Lk 22:15–20	Mk 14:22–25	Mt 26:26–29
Actions over the Bread	took gave thanks broke said	took gave thanks broke gave saying	took said the blessing broke gave said	took said the blessing broke giving it said
Words over Bread	This is my body, which is for you	This is my body, which is given for you	Take. This is my body	Take. Eat. This is my body
Command to Repeat	Do this in remembrance of me	Do this in remembrance of me		
Actions over the Cup	In the same way, also the cup, after the supper, saying . . .	And the cup in the same way, after the supper, saying . . .	Taking the cup gave thanks gave all drank from it	Taking the cup gave thanks gave all drank from it
Words over Cup	This cup is the new covenant in my blood	This cup [is] the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.	This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.	Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgive- ness of sins
Command to Repeat	Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.			

A comparison of the four New Testament accounts of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper (see Table 1) reveals significant, yet subtle, differences between them. Such differences include the actions over the bread (e.g. “gave thanks [*eucharistēsas*]” (1 Cor 11:24; Lk 22:19) or “said the blessing [*eulogēsas*]” (Mk 14:22; Mt 26:26), the presence or absence of the command to “do this in memory of me” and over what elements; the covenant language in connection with the cup; the object of the “pouring out” of blood.

The co-existence across accounts of basic similarities, but also with differences in phrasing, emphasis, and allusion, are theologically significant for the role of ecclesial tradition and reception vis-à-vis Jesus’ words and actions at the Last Supper. In light of the similarities and differences between accounts, which are themselves closely allied to Christian liturgical practices, Benedict

argues, the New Testament Church “was conscious of a strict obligation to faithfulness in essentials, but also recognized that the enormous resonance of these words, with their subtle references to Scripture, permitted a degree of nuanced redaction.”³⁵ The early Christian reception of Jesus’ words and actions at the Last Supper was such that some interpretation, explication, and editing was deemed appropriate and did not betray their historical reality.

Consider, for instance, the covenant language given in Jesus’ words over the cup. The Pauline–Lukan tradition reads “new covenant in my blood” (1 Cor 11:25; Lk 22:20), whereas the Markan–Matthean tradition has “my blood of the covenant” (Mk 14:24; Mt 26:28). Benedict observes that each formulation alludes to a different biblical covenant text. The Markan–Matthean formulation, “My blood of the covenant,” more readily recalls the Sinai covenant, which was founded “on God’s Word and Israel’s promise of obedience” and sealed in blood (cf. Ex 24:3–8).³⁶ The history of infidelity to the Sinai covenant contributed to Jeremiah’s prophecy of a “new covenant” (Jer 31:31–34) to which the Pauline–Lukan tradition alludes. Benedict sees a connection between the perfect obedience, stemming from the prophecy of the new covenant written on human hearts (cf. Jer 31:32–33), and Christ, who “took all human disobedience upon himself in his obedience even unto death, suffered it right to the end, and conquered it.”³⁷ These differences in the Pauline–Lukan and Markan–Matthean formulations indicate that both are bringing to light different dimensions or aspects of Jesus’ words and deeds at the Last Supper. The ecclesial reception of this reality is at the same time an interpretation or, to use a more phenomenological articulation, an occasion for the disclosure of its different aspects.³⁸

The early Christian reception and interpretation of the realities of Jesus’ life cannot be separated from the Holy Spirit, who indwells the Church and its members. Throughout both volumes of *Jesus of Nazareth*, Benedict frequently appeals to the activity of the Holy Spirit, who, as the Fourth Gospel teaches (cf. Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13–15), reveals the spiritual meaning of Jesus to the disciples after his resurrection.³⁹ Benedict explicitly associates

³⁵ Ibid., 2.127.

³⁶ Ibid., 2.132.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ My thinking in the latter formulation is informed by the work of Robert Sokolowski.

³⁹ See Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1.230–35; 2.21, 137, 144, 229. See also Wright, “New Synthesis,” 46–47; William M. Wright IV, “The Theology of Disclosure and Biblical Exegesis,” *The Thomist* 70 (2006): 404–11.

this work of the Holy Spirit in the disciples with the early Christian interpretation of Jesus' words and deeds at the Last Supper. He writes: "[T]he infant Church was slowly arriving at a deeper understanding of Jesus' mission and . . . the disciples' 'remembering', under the guidance of God's Spirit (cf. Jn. 14:26), was gradually beginning to grasp the whole of the mystery behind Jesus' words."⁴⁰ The creative fidelity, which the four New Testament accounts display with regard to the institution of the Eucharist, should be seen as proceeding from the insights into Jesus' words and actions revealed by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Benedict likewise discerns the activity of the Holy Spirit in guiding the development of liturgical form in early Christianity. He observes that Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper provide "the essentials of the new 'worship' . . . but no definitive liturgical form had yet been established—this was still to evolve in the life of the Church."⁴¹ As suggested in 1 Corinthians 11:17–33, a communal meal was held in connection with the Lord's Supper, but over time, these two became separated. Similarly, the essential link of the Eucharist to Jesus' death and resurrection (that is, his self-gift) contributed to Sunday becoming a fixed day for Christian liturgy.⁴² The conjoining to the Lord's Supper of Scripture readings (i.e. the liturgy of the Word), which early Christians adopted from synagogue practice, rounded out the basic structure of Christian liturgical form by the second century.⁴³ According to Benedict, the ecclesial reception and interpretation of realities in Jesus' life, which the Holy Spirit guides, is "an intrinsic part of the institution of the Eucharist . . . [for] the institution of the Eucharist presupposes the Resurrection and hence also the living community that, under the guidance of God's Spirit, gives form to the Lord's gift in the life of the faithful."⁴⁴

The reception and interpretation of Jesus' words and actions in the early Christian Church therefore plays an essential role in the unfolding of those realities as revelatory. This basic position is consistent with his early essay "Revelation and Tradition," which, although written some four decades before *Jesus of Nazareth*, can shed light on it.⁴⁵ Writing as Joseph

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2.137.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.139.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.139–44.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.143–44.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.144.

⁴⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, "Revelation and Tradition," in Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition, Quaestiones Disputatae* 17, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), 26–49. For a more substantial discussion of this essay and its importance for biblical interpretation, see Martin, "Joseph Ratzinger on Biblical Interpretation," esp. 285–93.

Ratzinger, he there argues that revelation can be present only when its content is received in faith: "Revelation is in fact fully present only when, in addition to the material statements which testify to it, its own inner reality is itself operative in the form of faith."⁴⁶ The reality of revelation is the Word of God and hence Christ himself. Accordingly, revelation cannot be reduced to or identified with Scripture, which bears witness to revelation.⁴⁷ For Ratzinger, faith is the believer's reception of the Word of God by which the Word comes to indwell the believer.⁴⁸ Revelation, then, involves both the objective content of the Word of God and its subjective reception in believers. The interplay between objective content and subjective reception as ingredient to the whole reality of revelation sheds light on the importance of the ecclesial reception and interpretation of the realities of Jesus' life, such as the institution of the Eucharist. In this case, the words and deeds of Jesus at the Last Supper (that is, the objective content) were received (subjectively) by the believing community in whom Christ dwells and works through the Holy Spirit. The ecclesial reception and interpretation of the realities of Jesus' life can be regarded as essential to revelation because of the presence of the Word both in the life of Jesus and in the Church and believers by faith.

The process of ecclesial reception and interpretation in faith of biblical realities, evident in the New Testament traditions of the institution of the Eucharist, can be extended analogously to the post-biblical Church.⁴⁹ The non-identity of revelation and Scripture, the fact that the reality of revelation is more than Scripture, and the presence of the indwelling Word in the Church and believers by faith all create the space for the post-biblical articulation of revelation's contents in the Church's dogmatic formulae.⁵⁰ For Ratzinger, the Church's doctrinal tradition is its interpretation of the canonical Scripture, which presents the Word of God to its readers, in light of the same Word of God, who indwells her by faith.⁵¹ Framed in this way, normative expressions of the Church's faith, for instance, dogmatic formulae, have

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, "Revelation and Tradition," 36. As Martin ("Joseph Ratzinger on Biblical Interpretation," 289 n.16) notes, Ratzinger develops this claim from his analysis of Bonaventure. See Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes, O.F.M. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), 64–69.

⁴⁷ Ratzinger, "Revelation and Tradition," 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁹ I say analogous because the Tradition and Magisterium of the post-biblical Church is beholden to both the simple, plain sense of the canonical Scripture and the *regula fidei* in a way that the New Testament churches were not; see Ratzinger, "Revelation and Tradition," 47–49.

⁵⁰ Ratzinger, "Revelation and Tradition," 35, 40, 44–45.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

an intrinsic relationship to Scripture. The same Spirit-guided processes of ecclesial reception and interpretation of revealed realities in faith, which are ingredient to the biblical books themselves, are extended into the post-biblical Church and its interpretation of Scripture. Hence, a doctrine like transubstantiation, although historically and conceptually posterior to the New Testament, can be regarded as a bringing to light of an aspect of Jesus' words and deeds at the Last Supper in a manner analogous to the Pauline-Lukan and Markan-Matthean traditions bringing to light the different covenantal allusions in Jesus' words.

To conclude this section on the ecclesial reception and interpretation of biblical realities, it is worth noting that Benedict's account is similar in many ways to a proposal set forth by Raymond Brown in his *Introduction to the New Testament*. As he nears the end of his discussion of revelation, Brown outlines a proposal in which "revelation involves both God's action for human salvation and the *interpretation* of that action by those whom God has raised up and guided for that purpose."⁵² The realities of salvation history by which God acts for the redemption of the world are given a theological interpretation by certain, inspired individuals. Brown then extends this Spirit-guided interpretation into the history of the Church:

"[T]here is no reason to think that God has ceased to guide a developing interpretation of that action. Indeed, the subsequent role of the Spirit in human history, in the history of the church and its pronouncements, in the writings of the Fathers and theologians enters into a *Tradition that embodies the post-scriptural interpretation of the salvific action of God described in Scripture*."⁵³

For both Brown and Benedict, the divinely guided interpretation of revealed realities, which took place within the biblical writings themselves, continues within the same historically continuous community of faith.

Conclusion

Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth* offers a healthy challenge and contribution to Catholic biblical interpretation. It is a challenge for Catholic biblical interpreters to give "no less attention" to the theological-ecclesial principles of interpretation in *Dei Verbum* §12c than to the historical-literary ones. It also makes a contribution by virtue of its being a substantial effort to work out an integration of these interpretive principles in both theory and practice.

⁵² Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 33–34; italics Brown's.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 34; italics Brown's.

Benedict's treatment of the institution of the Eucharist provides an interesting case study for thinking about the integration of the two sets of interpretive principles. On the one hand, Benedict attends to the importance of historical reality and the reception and interpretation of those realities within New Testament Christianity. At the same time, those dynamics of ecclesial reception and interpretation, brought to light by historical and literary analysis, provide the basis and template for the incorporation of the theological principles of the Church's tradition and faith. In this way, the kind of theological interpretation proposed by Benedict can be seen in broad terms as intrinsically related, and thus appropriate, to the nature of Scripture itself. With Benedict's multi-volume project nearing completion, it now remains for biblical scholars and theologians to continue this work of integration, so that exegesis can "see itself once again as a theological discipline, without abandoning its historical character."⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2.xiv.