

Inspired Scripture as a Sacramental Vehicle of Divine Presence in the Gospel of John and *Dei Verbum*

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COMMENTING ON ORIGEN'S THEOLOGY of biblical interpretation, Henri de Lubac states that, for the great Alexandrian exegete, the spiritual understanding of Scripture "communicates the very reality of the One whose riches are unfathomable."¹ "It is," de Lubac writes, quoting from Origen's *Homily 6* on Isaiah, "a 'visit from Jesus.'"² These remarks are indicative of an understanding of Scripture as a means by which the reality, the *res*, of Jesus himself becomes present to the faith-filled reader. This doctrinal vision wherein Christ himself becomes present to properly disposed readers of Scripture involves an understanding of Sacred Scripture as generically sacramental. Such an understanding of Scripture has deep roots in the Christian tradition. Yves Congar describes the traditional understanding in this way: "The divine Scriptures are regarded as a kind of sacrament: a grace-bearing sign that effectively realizes communion with God, and salvation, when it is used in the right conditions. These conditions are obviously spiritual: humility, pu-

¹ Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash and Juvenal Merriell (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007 [1950]), 382.

² *Ibid.*, 382, quoting Origen, *Homilies on Isaiah* 6.3.

rity of heart, a true desire to seek God and a strong love of the Gospel.”³

The Second Vatican Council incorporates this traditional belief into its teaching about the nature of Sacred Scripture in *Dei Verbum*. The most explicit place where *Dei Verbum* discusses Scripture in sacramental terms is §21, which begins, “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord.”⁴ This comparison with the Eucharist informs the paragraph’s subsequent teaching about Scripture’s normative and spiritually nourishing role in the Church’s life. Another, more subtle, instance appears in *Dei Verbum* §2, which discusses the “deeds and words” (*gestis verbisque*) in the divine economy of revelation. Within this economy, both biblical signs (*verba*) and signified (*res*) are intrinsically related to each other (*intrinsece inter se connexis*).

In this essay, I will argue that a sacramental understanding of Scripture as a vehicle of divine presence, present in the Church Fathers and appropriated by *Dei Verbum*, can be found in Scripture itself, especially (though not exclusively) in the Gospel according to John. Focusing on the Resurrection narrative in John 20, I will argue that the Fourth Gospel understands itself as a vehicle of divine presence through which later generations of believers can truly encounter the risen Jesus and grow in their relationship with him in faith and love. Not only does the Fourth Gospel provide biblical warrant for thinking of Scripture in sacramental terms, but it also illumines the traditional teaching in *Dei Verbum* and provides substance for further theological thinking about God’s Word in the life of the Church.

The Fourth Gospel as a Vehicle of Divine Presence

Encountering the Risen Lord in John 20

Chapter 20 of John’s Gospel is a sequence of four scenes, which depicts the movement of several disciples to faith in the reality of Jesus as the

³ Yves Congar, O.P., *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004 [1964]), 90–91. My thanks to Francis Martin for bringing this text to my attention as well as for many conversations related to this topic.

⁴ All citations (English and Latin) of Church documents will be taken from the texts archived at the website of the Holy See (www.vatican.va).

risen Lord.⁵ It does so by first narrating the discovery of the empty tomb (20:1–10) and then Resurrection appearances to Mary Magdalene (20:11–18), to the disciples on Easter Sunday night without Thomas (20:19–25), and a second appearance to the disciples, a week later, with Thomas present (20:26–29). After this Resurrection appearance to the disciples with Thomas, John provides valuable (and famous) commentary about his purposes in writing: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which have not been written in this book. But these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name” (20:30–31).⁶

The majority of Johannine scholars regard 20:30–31 as the original ending to the Gospel narrative with chapter 21 subsequently added in the Gospel’s composition history as an epilogue. However, this exegetical position deemphasizes the many connections that vv. 30–31 have with the preceding narrative material in 20:1–29. Accordingly, as Paul Minear and others have argued, these verses should be regarded primarily as the conclusion to the narrative sequence in John 20 and not to the Gospel as a whole.⁷ One such connection between vv. 30–31 and the preceding narrative sequence concerns the cause of faith in Jesus as the risen Lord. The narrator claims in vv. 30–31 that the written Gospel has a causal function vis-à-vis people’s faith in Jesus as the Son of God. If we take vv. 30–31 as the conclusion to the narrative sequence in John 20, then we can more readily view its claim in light of what the preceding narrative presents as the only thing that brings about the disciples’ faith in the Resurrection: a personal encounter with Jesus as the risen Lord.

In short, my exegetical argument is the following: the narrative

⁵ I follow the four-scene division of John 20 proposed by Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus According to John*, trans. Dom G. Murray, O.S.B. (Staten Island: Alba House, 1989), 159–90. Compare with the two-scene division of John 20 in Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., Anchor Bible 29–29A (New York: Doubleday, 1966–70), 2.965.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the biblical text are my own.

⁷ For argumentation on this point, see Paul S. Minear, “The Original Functions of John 21,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 85–98; Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. Francis Noel Davey (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 550; Gail R. O’Day, *The Gospel of John*, *The New Interpreter’s Bible* 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 851–52, 854–55.

sequence in John 20 presents a personal encounter with the risen Jesus as necessary for arriving at full, Resurrection faith in him as the Lord. John himself claims in 20:30–31 that the Gospel has been written to bring about faith in Jesus as the Son of God in its audience. This narrative logic indicates that the Gospel presents itself as mediating for its audience a genuine encounter with Jesus as the risen Lord—an encounter as genuine as that of those first disciples who saw the risen Jesus in his glorified humanity.

We can appreciate John's claim that faith in Jesus as the risen Lord requires a personal encounter with him when we examine each of the four scenes in John 20 and consider all those things that do not cause, or are insufficient to cause, people to believe in the reality of the risen Jesus.⁸

The first of the four scenes in John 20 centers on the discovery of the empty tomb (20:1–10). The scene opens with Mary Magdalene arriving at Jesus's tomb in the predawn darkness, which, in view of John's use of light and dark symbolism, is indicative of her being bereft of Jesus, who is the Light of the World (8:12; 9:5). John reports that Mary "saw the stone having been taken away from the tomb" (20:1). Mary sees the opened tomb and presumably does so at a distance because there is no indication of her looking into or entering the tomb (cf. 20:11–12). Simply seeing Jesus's open tomb from the outside is insufficient to cause faith in him, for, as the narrative itself indicates, the open tomb can be variously interpreted. Hence Mary's conclusion that Jesus's tomb has been the object of grave robbery: "They took the master out of the tomb, and we don't know where they put him" (20:2).

Through Mary Magdalene, John provides his audience with an external view of the empty tomb from a distance. Then, through Peter and the Beloved Disciple, he takes his audience right up to and inside Jesus's tomb. After hearing Mary's claim about grave robbery, Peter and the Beloved Disciple run out toward Jesus's tomb (20:3–4). The Beloved Disciple arrives at the tomb first, but he remains outside at the tomb's entrance. From his position at the entrance, the Beloved Disciple bends down to look inside, and he sees Jesus's grave clothes lying within (20:5). When Peter arrives, he actually goes into the tomb, and the Gospel's

⁸ Many of these points are likewise discussed in Minear, "Original Functions of John 21," 88–89.

audience is given to see the empty tomb from the inside. As the Beloved Disciple did from the entrance, Peter sees Jesus's grave clothes. John adds that Peter also saw the face covering, which had been on Jesus's corpse, now folded up and in a separate place (20:6–7).

Throughout this scene, John repeatedly uses verbs in the passive voice for actions performed with respect to Jesus's tomb: the stone "having been taken away (*ērmēnon*)" (20:2); the grave clothes "having been laid down (*keimēna*)" (20:5); the face covering "folded up (*entetuligmenon*)" (20:6). This use of the divine passive is a syntactical indication that God has acted in connection with Jesus's empty tomb.⁹ This general notion of divine activity probably underlies John's claim that the Beloved Disciple, upon entering the tomb, "saw and started to believe (*kai eiden kai episteusen*)" (20:8).

Many commentators interpret this remark to indicate that the Beloved Disciple was the first to arrive at full faith in the Risen Jesus.¹⁰ These commentators take the Greek *kai eiden kai episteusen* to mean simply "he saw and believed." This interpretation is certainly in keeping with the privilege and priority accorded to the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel. For instance, the Beloved Disciple rests upon Jesus's chest, or heart, (*en tō kolpō*) at the Last Supper (13:23), in a manner analogous to the Prologue's statement that the Son is "in the Father's heart (*eis ton kolpon tou patrōs*)" (1:18); the identity of Jesus's betrayer is revealed only to the Beloved Disciple (13:25–26); he is the disciple, who witnesses the blood and water flowing from Jesus's pierced side (19:34–36); he outruns Peter and arrives first at Jesus's tomb (20:4); in John 21,

⁹ Donatien Mollat, "La découverte du tombeau vide," in *Études johanniques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1979), 518; referenced by Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 518–20.

¹⁰ E.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 561, 564, 573; Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 86; Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 987, 1001; Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 540; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 2.1184; Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 520–21, 523; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. K. Smyth et al., 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1968–82), 3.312.

he is the first to realize that the risen Jesus speaks from the seashore to the embarked disciples (21:7).

However, there are two factors, which I think work against this interpretation of the Beloved Disciple as the first person in the Gospel to arrive at full Easter faith. First, when John uses the verb *pisteuein* in the aorist, it is often an ingressive aorist with the sense of “began to believe.”¹¹ For example, Jesus’s disciples “began to believe in him (*episteusan eis auton*)” (2:11) after the miracle at the Wedding at Cana. But as especially evidenced in the Farewell Discourses, Jesus’s disciples, although positively disposed to him, have little grasp of the significance of Jesus’s words and deeds during his ministry (e.g., 13:16–14:9, 22–24; 16:16–33). Even more stark is John’s claim that a group of Jews “began to believe in him (*episteusan eis auton*)” (8:30) during Jesus’s teaching in Jerusalem at the Festival of Tabernacles. It is this same group of incipient believers that Jesus engages in an increasingly sharp debate in which each says the other is associated with the demonic (8:44, 48) and which culminates in the former’s attempt to kill Jesus (8:59). In these cases, the kind of faith that is spoken of has some legitimacy, but it is very imperfect. The second major factor is the narrator’s commentary in 20:9, which interprets the activity of Peter and the Beloved Disciple at the tomb: “they had not yet known the Scripture that it was necessary for him to rise from the dead.” The evangelist explicitly claims that at that time, when they saw the empty tomb and grave clothes, both Peter and the Beloved Disciple did not have a grasp of the Scriptural (and thus providential) necessity of Jesus’s Resurrection. It is because “they did yet not know” (20:9) about the Scriptural necessity of the Resurrection that these two disciples left the tomb and went back home (20:10). The Beloved Disciple may have been the first to arrive at some general notion that God was involved in Jesus’s tomb being empty. But this incipient belief should not be confused with a full, robust faith in the reality of Jesus as the risen Lord. As Gail O’Day puts it, “What the beloved disciple

¹¹ Jn 2:11, 22–23; 4:39, 41, 53; 7:31; 8:30; 10:42; 11:45. So too Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to St. John*, 3.312; see F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, ed. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), §331 (p. 171).

believes . . . is the evidence of the empty tomb . . . [His] faith is as complete as faith in the evidence of the empty tomb can be.”¹²

In the first scene in John 20, therefore, the evangelist presents three things, which, although related to Jesus’s Resurrection, do not of their own accord cause faith in him as the risen Lord: the open and empty tomb (whether seen from afar, up close, or inside); Jesus’s grave clothes; the face covering, which had been on Jesus’s corpse, now lying separately.

The second of the four scenes, 20:11–18, centers on Mary Magdalene, who remains at the empty tomb after Peter and the Beloved Disciple have left. In this scene, John presents Mary’s movement from hopelessness and unbelief to full faith in Jesus as the risen Lord. The scene opens with Mary “crying” (*klaiousa*; 20:11) outside the empty tomb, a detail that recalls Jesus’s prediction at the Farewell Discourse that his disciples will “cry” (*klausetē*) when they no longer see him (16:20). Like the Beloved Disciple, Mary looks inside the tomb from its threshold. Unlike the Beloved Disciple and even more dramatically, Mary sees two angels seated on the slab where Jesus’s corpse had been (20:13). Astonishingly, Mary is completely unmoved by this angelophany. When the angels ask about her weeping, Mary gives basically the same response, which she had previously given to Peter and the Beloved Disciple: “they took my master away, and I do not know where they put him” (20:13; cf. 20:2).¹³ Mary remains fixed in her belief that Jesus’s corpse has been stolen, and not even the appearance of two angels in the empty tomb can shake this belief.

After speaking to the angels, Mary turns around to see the risen Jesus, whom she does not recognize, mistaking him for the gardener (20:14–15). Jesus puts the same question to Mary as the angels did, “Woman, why are you weeping?” and his address to her as “woman” (*gunai*) is significant. The three other occasions in John where Jesus uses

¹² O’Day, *Gospel of John*, 841. Similarly, Minear interprets the various things in Jn 20 that are insufficient to cause faith in the Risen Jesus (e.g., the empty tomb, the grave clothes, the angels in the tomb) as the “many other signs [which Jesus did] in the presence of his disciples” spoken of in 20:30. “Original Functions,” 88–89.

¹³ There is a shift in Mary’s use from the first-person plural pronouns in 20:2 (we don’t know where they put him) to the first person in 20:13 (I don’t know where they put him). This shift to the first person in 20:13 reinforces that 20:11–18 concerns Mary Magdalene’s personal relationship with Jesus. So noted in de la Potterie, *Hour of Jesus*, 171.

“woman” in the vocative (2:4; 4:21; 19:26) all appear in situations wherein Jesus is establishing a new relationship between a specific female (e.g., his mother, the Samaritan woman) and another individual, either himself or the Beloved Disciple.¹⁴ Jesus adds, “Whom are you looking for?” a question that both recalls his first words to his disciples in 1:38 and picks up on Mary’s present search for Jesus. Mary responds by reiterating her belief that Jesus’s corpse has been stolen and offers to take custody of it (20:15). The key point here is that Mary’s attention remains fixed in the past: she believes that Jesus is still dead and his corpse is missing.

It is only when Jesus calls her name “Mary” (20:16), as the Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name (10:3), that she becomes alerted to his presence. But even this new awareness that Jesus is now alive, does not constitute full faith in his Resurrection. Mary responds to Jesus by calling him “Rabbouni” (20:16), a title that is appropriate to his earthly ministry when he was her teacher and master (cf. 13:13–14), and the text implies that Mary also embraces Jesus as such (cf. Mt 28:9). Mary now believes that Jesus is alive, but she continues to relate to him as she did previously, that is, as her teacher and master.

This way of relating to Jesus, however, is no longer possible after the Resurrection. Hence Jesus tells Mary to stop touching him, and he then provides the reason: “I have not yet ascended to the Father” (20:17). Throughout the Gospel, Jesus teaches that he has been sent by the Father and offers the gift of eternal life to those who believe in him (3:15–16, 36; 6:40, 47). The Prologue articulates this anthropological aspect to salvation in the language of family relations: he gave them “the power to become children of God” (1:13). For John, eternal life

¹⁴ Jesus’s first address to his mother as “woman” (2:4) occurs within a narrative dynamic wherein, as Francis Martin puts it, “the relation between Jesus and his mother is founded, not on the ties of human birth, but on the nature of Jesus’ mission as determined by the Father”; citation from Francis Martin, “Mary in Sacred Scripture: An Ecumenical Reflection,” *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 538. For further argumentation, see B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 36–37; Albert Vanhoye, “Interrogation johannique et exégèse de Cana (Jn 2, 4),” *Biblica* 55 (1974): 163–67. In 4:21, Jesus moves the relationship between himself and the Samaritan woman from within the horizon of extant Jewish-Samaritan relations (4:7–10) to the community of the messianic age, which he establishes (4:21–26). In 19:26–27, Jesus reveals the bonds of spiritual maternity and childhood between his mother and the Beloved Disciple by referring to the former as “mother” of the latter, her “son.”

consists in becoming a child of God. This is a participatory share in Jesus's own relationship to the Father as the Son. Through his death, Resurrection, and entrance into the Father's glory, Jesus establishes this new relationship between the disciples and the Father. This point is articulated in 20:17 through the use of family language in the words of the risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene. For the first time in the Gospel, Jesus refers to his disciples as his "brothers," implying that Jesus and his disciples now relate to the same Father as sons. This point is even clearer in the message, which the risen Jesus entrusts to Mary to deliver to his brothers: "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, My God and your God" (20:17).

The risen Jesus thus teaches that he opens up the divine communion to his disciples, who can now relate to the Father in a new way by participating in Jesus's own life and identity as the Son. As de la Potterie observes, with the recognition of this new relationship with the Father and the Son, Mary Magdalene makes the characteristic declaration of having arrived at full faith in the reality of the risen Jesus: "I have seen the Lord" (20:18).¹⁵ Mary no longer relates to Jesus simply as teacher or master, but now as "Lord," as sharing the identity of YHWH himself.¹⁶

Over the course of this second scene, we see Mary's movement in faith from being fixated on the past—either her belief that Jesus is dead or her relating to him as she previously did—to a present encounter with Him as the risen Lord. A knowledge and relationship with Jesus during his mortal life is insufficient to cause faith in him as the Son of God. It is only when Mary personally encounters the risen Jesus as the one who has opened up the divine communion to believers, that she can confess him as "the Lord."

The last two scenes in the sequence of John 20 concern the appearances of the risen Jesus to his disciples on Easter Sunday evening without Thomas (20:19–25) and then to the disciples on the following Sunday evening with Thomas present (20:26–29). The numerous points of contact between these two scenes (not least of which is the presence or

¹⁵ De la Potterie, *Hour of Jesus*, 162–65, 174–75.

¹⁶ I draw here on the divine identity Christology set forth in Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

absence of Thomas) suggest that John invites his audience to read these scenes in light of each other.

Two points, which emerge from these scenes, are especially germane to this study. First, these two scenes reinforce the claim that only a personal encounter with the risen Jesus brings about faith in him as the Lord. Second, a personal encounter with Jesus as the risen Lord is not limited to seeing him in his glorified humanity.

Several narrative indicators provide further support to the theological claim already articulated in the previous scene with Mary Magdalene—only a personal encounter with the risen Jesus causes faith in him as Lord. These can be appreciated by comparing the states of the disciples before and after their encountering the risen Jesus. The third scene opens with the narrator stating, “the doors were locked where the disciples were out of fear of ‘the Jews’” (20:19). John uses the same language to open the fourth scene, but with a significant omission. The narrator says, “the doors were locked” (20:26), but there is no mention of the disciples being afraid. The disciples’ encounter with the risen Jesus on Easter Sunday evening has caused a definite change in them: it has removed their fear. This change in the disciples’ status comes to light in other ways. When the risen Jesus appears to the disciples and shows them his pierced hands and side, the narrator reports that the disciples “rejoiced when they saw the Lord” (20:20). The mention of “rejoicing” (*chairein*) recalls the words of Jesus in the Farewell Discourse: “Now you are full of grief. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice (*charēsetai*) and no one will take your joy away from you” (16:22). As Jesus predicted in 16:20, the disciples’ “grief [has] become joy.” After their encounter with the risen Jesus, the disciples declare their Resurrection faith to the now-present Thomas with the same language that Mary Magdalene had used in 20:18: “We have seen the Lord” (20:25)—with the verb *hōran* in the perfect tense. In the fourth scene, when Thomas encounters the Risen Jesus, he confesses Him as “My Lord and my God” (20:28), perhaps echoing the Scriptural name *YHWH ‘elohim*. Once again, this confession of Easter faith is articulated with the verb *hōran* in the perfect tense, although in Thomas’s case appears in the words of Jesus to Thomas: “You have believed because you have seen me (*heōrakas*).” In both cases, the disciples’ personal encounter with the risen Jesus has led them to confess Jesus as the Lord, as *kyrios*.

However, John is also quick to affirm that such a personal encounter with Jesus as the risen Lord is not limited to a direct, tangible encounter with his glorified humanity as in a Resurrection appearance. This point especially comes to light in the fourth scene where the risen Jesus appears to Thomas, a scene that segues into the narrator's remarks about his purposes in writing the Gospel in 20:30–31.

When Thomas protests the disciples' confession "We have seen the Lord" (20:25), he sets up a direct, tangible encounter with the risen Jesus a necessary condition for his belief. John underscores this point through the extensive use of both somatic and sensory language in the condition of Thomas's protest: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the mark of the nails and my hand into his side" (20:25). For Thomas, the necessity of a direct, tangible encounter with the glorified humanity of the risen Jesus as a prerequisite for faith is reinforced with the emphatic negative in the apodosis: *ou mē pisteusō* "I will never believe" (20:25).¹⁷

When the risen Jesus appears to the disciples with Thomas present, Jesus grants Thomas what he has requested: a direct, tangible encounter. Jesus's invitation to Thomas repeats much of the same somatic and sensory language from Thomas's initial protest (20:25): "Bring your finger here and see my hands. Bring your hand and put it into my side. Stop being an unbeliever, but (become) a believer." However, there is no indication (either stated or implied) that Thomas ever touches Jesus's glorified body. The personal encounter with the risen Jesus and his direct address to Thomas prove sufficient for Thomas to confess, "My Lord and my God" (20:28). Thomas has come to believe in Jesus as the risen Lord on account of his personal encounter with him, but a tangible experience of Jesus's glorified humanity has also shown itself to be unnecessary for this faith. Jesus makes this point clear in his concluding beatitude: "Blessed are those who have not seen and believe" (20:29).

This beatitude opens up the narrative's scope beyond itself and looks toward future generations of believers who will believe in Jesus as the risen Lord without literally seeing him in his glorified humanity. By pronouncing them to be "blessed," the risen Jesus indicates that the faith of

¹⁷ Thomas's protest in 20:25 is articulated as a future-more-vivid condition, which provides additional, syntactical emphasis.

these future believers is no less genuine than that of those first disciples who literally “have seen the Lord” (20:25). With the scope having been so opened and the genuineness of future believers’ faith affirmed, the narrative sequence comes to rest by specifying the means by which later generations of believers will encounter the reality of the risen Jesus and come to believe in him as the Lord: through “these things [that] have been written” (20:31).

This notice in 20:31 has been prepared for by previous statements, which look beyond the Gospel’s own narrative horizon to future generations of believers. During the Good Shepherd discourse, Jesus declares that he has sheep, which are “not from this fold” (likely an allusion to future, Gentile believers), and these sheep “will hear my voice” (10:16). Similarly, in his prayer of intercession in John 17, Jesus prays for all his disciples both present and future. Jesus specifically designates the latter as those “who will believe in me through their [i.e., his disciples’] word” (17:20). When taken together with the preceding analysis of John 20, these statements suggest that the principal means by which future generations of believers will encounter the reality of the risen Lord and “hear his voice” is through the disciples’ word, or to use John’s preferred term, their “testimony.” The Fourth Gospel itself claims to preserve the testimony of the Beloved Disciple, whom it identifies as “the one who testifies about these things and has written them” (21:24).

The disciples’ testimony, either in oral or written form, is, therefore, a key component in the Fourth Gospel’s understanding of itself as a vehicle of the risen Jesus’s presence to later generations of believers. In the next section, I will argue that the disciples’ testimony (which includes the written Gospel) has this capacity to mediate Jesus’s presence to later generations of believers in a genuine manner because of the action of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. In other words, divine inspiration gives the written Gospel this unique capacity to mediate the reality of Jesus to later generations of believers.

Inspired Testimony

Ignace de la Potterie rightly observes that the Johannine writings often

use the language of testimony as a term for divine revelation.¹⁸ This applies to Jesus's revelation of the Father and divine truth (3:32–33; 7:7; 8:14, 18; 18:37). Jesus “testifies to what he has seen and heard” (3:32) for he, the only one who has “seen” the Father (1:18; 6:46), speaks “what [he] has heard in the Father’s presence” (8:38). As the Father’s perfect emissary, who is himself “the Truth” (14:6), Jesus alone is able to give valid testimony about himself (8:13–14).¹⁹ More frequently, the Gospel speaks of other persons giving testimony to Jesus, such as John the Baptist (1:7–8, 15, 19; 3:28; 5:36), Jesus’s works (5:36; 10:25), the Scriptures (5:39), and through all of these is the testimony of the Father (5:32; cf. 8:18). All these witnesses testify, de la Potterie writes, “directly to the secret of [Jesus’s] being, to the mystery of his person.”²⁰

There are only three instances where the Gospel speaks of Jesus’s disciples giving testimony about him.²¹ Two of the three pertain specifically to the testimony given by the Beloved Disciple. The first instance is the Beloved Disciple’s eyewitness testimony about the flow of blood and water from the side of Jesus’s corpse (19:35). The second occurs in 21:24, where the narrator states that the Beloved Disciple’s testimony has been written in the Gospel. Between these two cases (19:35; 21:24), the narrator describes the Beloved Disciple’s testimony as “true” three times. At the crucifixion, the narrator says of the Beloved Disciple, “his testimony is true (*alēthinē*), and he knows that he is speaking the truth (*alēthē*)” (19:35). Likewise, at the very conclusion of the Gospel, the narrator says of the Beloved Disciple, “we know that his testimony is true

¹⁸ For a survey discussion, see Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., *La Vérité dans saint Jean*, 2 vols., *Analecta Biblica* 73–74 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1999 [1975]), 1.80–88; George Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 135–37.

¹⁹ See Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to St. John*, 2.120–21, 192–93. On Jesus as the Father’s emissary, see Peder Borgen, “God’s Agent in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 137–48; reprinted in *The Interpretation of John*, 2nd ed., ed. John Ashton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 83–95.

²⁰ de la Potterie, *La Vérité*, 1.82.

²¹ A minor exception is the Samaritan woman “who testified” to her fellow townspeople about what Jesus told her (4:39). This case reinforces the basic point that “testimony” is effectively a synonym for “evangelization” in John (so de la Potterie, *La Vérité*, 1.80), for on the basis of her testimony the Samaritans came to Jesus directly and believed in him.

(*alēthēs*)” (21:24). These statements in 19:35 and 21:24 combine three elements: a disciple, giving testimony, which is the truth. This three-part combination appears only one other time in the Gospel, and it is the third instance where the disciples are said to give testimony: the Paraclete promise in 15:26–27.

Three things in this Paraclete text (15:26–27) stand out for present purposes. First, Jesus says that the Paraclete himself “will testify” (15:26). Insight into where, how, and to whom the Paraclete testifies can be obtained from the first Paraclete promise (14:16–17). When Jesus first announces that the Paraclete will come to the disciples, he declares that the Paraclete will dwell within his disciples: “he remains with you and will be in you” (*en hymin estai*; 14:17). The activity of the Paraclete is an interior activity, which he works only in Jesus’s disciples. The latter point is underscored by the sharp contrast, which Jesus draws between his disciples and the world. Jesus explicitly states, “the world cannot receive [the Paraclete] because it neither sees nor knows him” (14:16).²² Because the world does not “receive” (*lambanein*) Jesus (1:11; 5:43), it is incapable of receiving the Paraclete, whom Jesus will send. As Lyonnet writes, “Since the world has showed it was incapable of ‘perceiving’ the Spirit at work during Jesus’ life, it is also unable to ‘know’ him.”²³ What fundamentally distinguishes the disciples from the world is their own “receiving” of Jesus in faith and discipleship (1:12; 3:3; 17:8). The Spirit has been present with Jesus throughout his ministry (1:32–34), and the disciples, “despite their intellectual simplicity, had attached themselves to Jesus, and believed and knew that he was the Holy One of God.”²⁴ The

²² As de la Potterie observes, the Fourth Gospel often uses *lambanein* to designate the human reception of heavenly realities. For instance, people can receive (or not receive) Jesus himself (1:11–12; 5:34, 43; 13:20), his words (12:48; 17:8), testimony about Jesus (3:11; 3:32–33), the Holy Spirit (7:39; 14:17; 20:22), and heavenly gifts (3:27; 16:24). *Hour of Jesus*, 117–20.

²³ Stanislas Lyonnet, S.J., “The Paraclete,” in *The Christian Lives by the Spirit*, ed. Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., and Stanislas Lyonnet, S.J., trans. John Morriss (Staten Island: Alba House, 1971), 60.

²⁴ *Ibid.* This connection between the Paraclete’s indwelling and the disciples’ faith receives further support from other texts that speak of the Spirit as “living water,” which “will become a spring of water *in him*” (4:14) and “will flow out from him” (7:37–38). The narrator’s commentary in 7:39 similarly identifies faith as the prerequisite disposition for receiving the Spirit: “he said this about the Spirit, which those who believed (*hoi pisteusantes*) in him were going to receive (*lambanein*)” (7:39).

disciples' relationship with Jesus opens them up to receive the Paraclete and disposes them to his action upon their hearts. When Jesus says that the Paraclete "will testify" (15:26), it is understood that the Paraclete gives testimony only to the disciples and does so within them.

Second, 15:26 specifies Jesus as the content of the Paraclete's testimony: "he will testify about me." Significant in this regard is the title "the Spirit of Truth" by which Jesus refers to the Paraclete in 15:26. This title, given to the Paraclete three times in the Farewell Discourses (14:16; 15:26; 16:13), emphasizes the "christological dependence" of the Paraclete, his essential relationship with Jesus and thus with the Father.²⁵ The Gospel consistently identifies the divine revelation of Jesus as "the Truth."²⁶ As the divine Word, who reveals the Father and himself as the Son, Jesus is himself "the Truth" (14:6; 17:17), and he "has spoken the truth, which [he] heard in the Father's presence" (8:40; cf. 18:37). As the Spirit of Truth, the Paraclete is the Spirit of Jesus, and his activity within the disciples—he speaks and announces (16:13–14), teaches and reminds (14:26), and testifies—pertains to Jesus's divine revelation, that is, the truth. The richest expression of this activity appears in the fourth Paraclete promise: "the Spirit of Truth will lead you to all truth" (16:11). De la Potterie thus describes this activity of the Spirit: the Paraclete "will cause [the disciples] to understand the true significance and bearing of the words of Jesus . . . his task will be to interpret, through the Church, the revelation of Jesus, still not fully understood."²⁷ He later adds, "the task of the Spirit will be to cause the message of Jesus to penetrate into the hearts of the faithful, to give them the understanding of faith."²⁸

The testimony, which the Spirit of Truth gives about Jesus, is not a generic expression of his pedagogy. Rather, it has a distinctly forensic dimension, related to the context in which the third Paraclete saying (15:26–27) occurs.²⁹ This promise appears within a unit of discourse,

²⁵ Johnston, *Spirit-Paraclete*, 37.

²⁶ As de la Potterie summarizes, "the truth is the revelation which comes to us from the Father and is passed on to us in the actual word of Jesus" in Ignace de la Potterie, "The Truth in Saint John," *Rivista biblica italiana* 11 (1963): 3–24; reprinted in Ash-ton, *Interpretation of John*, 71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁹ I follow, in this paragraph, de la Potterie, *La Vérité*, 1.391–96.

where Jesus announces to his disciples that they will receive the same hatred and persecution from the world as he did (15:18–16:4a). The occurrence of a prophetic saying about the Spirit assisting Jesus's disciples in a future time of persecution resembles similar units of discourse in the Synoptics (Mt 10:16–25; Mk 13:9–13; Lk 12:2, 10–12). These Synoptic counterparts envision a forensic setting in which the Spirit serves as a legal advocate (or Paraclete) for the disciples, providing them with what to say or speaking on their behalf (Mt 10:19–20; Mk 13:11; Lk 12:11–12). Within the Johannine articulation, the Paraclete's testimony similarly provides consolation and assistance to the disciples in their confrontation with the world. As Jesus indicates in the words that follow the third Paraclete promise, the primary threat to the disciples will be apostasy: "I have told you these things so that you may not fall away" (16:1; cf. 6:61–66). This inner activity of the Paraclete, therefore, "is not only a teaching . . . it is called 'testimony'; it will consist in making the disciples' faith unshakable, which the opposition of the world could imperil."³⁰ The Paraclete will convince the disciples of the reality of Jesus that they will be able to stand firm against the assaults of the world.

Third, 15:26–27 establishes a connection between the Paraclete's inner testimony and the disciples' own testimony: "he will testify about me, and you also testify" (15:26–27). The inner testimony of Paraclete about Jesus enables the disciples to give testimony about Jesus outwardly to the unbelieving world.³¹ As Augustine puts it, "he will bear witness and you will also bear witness: he in your hearts, you in your voices; he by inspiring, you by speaking out loud."³² The disciples' testimony is thus part of their mission to the world. In his intercessory prayer to the Father, Jesus thus prays for his disciples, "As you sent me into the world, so I also send them into the world" (17:18). Later, when the risen Jesus appears to the disciples on Easter Sunday evening, he commissions them: "as the Father sent me, so I also send you" (20:21). The risen Jesus then equips the disciples for their mission by breathing the Holy Spirit into them (20:22). The Father sent Jesus into the world to reveal him

³⁰ Ibid., 1.398.

³¹ So Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 2.700; de la Potterie, "Truth in Saint John," 75; Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to St. John*, 3.119.

³² Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 93.1 (PL 35:1864).

and do his work (4:34; 5:23; 8:29; 12:44–50; 18:37), and Jesus extends his mission through his disciples. Jesus was sent to make the Father known to the world for its salvation, and accordingly, the disciples' mission and testimony has an evangelizing and missionary character. Through their word and example of visible unity (17:21, 23) and faithful, loving practice (13:35), the disciples give testimony to the truth of Jesus's revelation (17:23). The purpose of the disciples' testimony is "so that the world may believe that you sent me" (17:21) and by believing in Jesus, receive the gift of participating in the divine communion of life between the Father and Son (17:23).

The disciples give testimony about Jesus to the world because the Paraclete has first given testimony about Jesus within the disciples. The indwelling Paraclete guides the disciples into the spiritual depths of Jesus's revelation, causing its truth to penetrate into their hearts. This inner activity of the Paraclete enables the disciples to give testimony to the world about Jesus through evangelization and to stand firm in the confrontation that it will necessarily provoke. Similarly, the narrator's claim that the Beloved Disciple's "testimony is true" (21:24) connects his testimony to the activity of the Spirit of Truth, who guides the disciples "to all truth" (16:13). The Beloved Disciple's testimony is "true" because it flows from the testimony of the "Spirit of Truth" (15:26) within him about Jesus who is himself "the Truth" (14:6). It is appropriate to say that the Beloved Disciple's testimony—and the written Gospel containing it—claims to be inspired by the Paraclete.³³

Summary

We are now in position to draw together the various findings of the exegetical part of this essay. The Resurrection narrative in John 20 indicates that the only thing sufficient to cause genuine faith in Jesus as

³³ The Gospel also gives evidence of having been composed in alignment with the activity of the Paraclete as described in its narrative. See William M. Wright IV, "The Theology of Disclosure and Biblical Exegesis," *The Thomist* 70 (2006): 405–11; Marinus de Jonge, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God—Jesus Christ and the Christians in Johannine Perspective*, trans. John E. Steely (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 7–12.

the risen Lord is a personal encounter with him. Such an encounter with the risen Jesus is not limited to those who literally saw him in his glorified humanity, but it can be had through the Gospel itself, which contains the testimony of the Beloved Disciple. When considered in light of the Paraclete promises in the Farewell Discourse, the Beloved Disciple's testimony comes to light as proceeding from the Spirit's inner activity. The Paraclete comes to dwell within Jesus's disciples after his glorification and teaches them the spiritual depths of Jesus's revelation. The Paraclete's inner testimony enables the disciples to give testimony about Jesus externally to the world and, by doing so, bring people to believe in him.

If the inspired testimony of the disciples enables later generations to believe in Jesus as Lord, and true faith in Jesus requires a genuine encounter with him as the risen Lord, then the disciples' inspired testimony, including its written form in the Gospel, mediates the reality of the risen Jesus to later generations, who can personally encounter him and thus believe in him. The Paraclete, who makes the risen Jesus present to the disciples (14:18, 23–26), has inspired the Beloved Disciple's testimony and so enabled his Gospel to serve as a vehicle by which later generations can encounter the reality of the risen Jesus.

Scripture as a Vehicle of Divine Presence in *Dei Verbum*

The preceding analysis of John's Gospel provides a helpful vantage point for viewing two key passages in *Dei Verbum* (§21 and §2), which articulate a generically sacramental understanding of Scripture as a vehicle of divine presence.

The sacramentality of Scripture appears most clearly in *Dei Verbum* §21, which compares Scripture and the Eucharist.³⁴ The paragraph begins, "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord." The reason why Scripture and the Eucharist are similarly venerated is that Christ, whom the text calls "the bread of life," is received "from the table both of God's word and of Christ's

³⁴ On this traditional comparison between Scripture and Eucharist, see Tarcisio Stramare, O.S.J., "Mensae duae" studio biblico-patristico su s. Scrittura ed Eucarestia," *Seminarium* 18 (1966): 1020–34.

body.”³⁵ The Church, especially in the liturgy, receives Christ himself (albeit in different forms) in both the Eucharist and in the Scripture.³⁶ By calling Christ “the bread of life,” the conciliar text openly alludes to the Bread of Life discourse in John 6:31–58. In this discourse, Jesus draws on biblical images that liken God’s Word (Torah) and Wisdom to food in order to reveal himself as God’s Word and Wisdom in the flesh, which he also gives “for the life of the world” on the cross and in the Eucharist (6:51).³⁷ As the divine Wisdom says in Sirach 24:19, “Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my produce,” so does Jesus similarly declare, “I am the Bread of Life. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never ever thirst” (Jn 6:35). Among the many teachings of this discourse, which are essential to a sacramental understanding of Scripture, is that Christ is “the Bread of Life” in his being the Word of God as well as in the gift of himself in the Eucharist. Accordingly, *Dei Verbum* §21 teaches that Christ, the Word of God and “the bread of life,” comes to the Church in the Scripture and the Eucharist, and the Church “unceasingly receives and offers [him] to the faithful.” Scripture is a means by which Christ comes to the Church.

Dei Verbum §21 places this mediating role of Scripture within a Trinitarian framework. The conciliar text speaks of all three Trinitarian persons in relation to the biblical books. For instance, the third sentence of §21 speaks of the heavenly Father, who “in the sacred books . . . meets His children with great love and speaks with them.” In the Scriptures, the Church receives Christ, “the bread of life,” and as they are fixed in writing, the Scriptures “impart the word of God Himself without change.” Moreover, the Scriptures “make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in

³⁵ Stanislaus Lyonnet observes that *Dei Verbum* §21 speaks of a single table, whereas *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (§48, 51) speaks of separate tables of the “body” and the “word.” “A Word on Chapters IV and VI of *Dei verbum*,” *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After* (1962–1987), vol. 1, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1988), 178. See also *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §18; *Perfectae Caritatis* §6.

³⁶ Lyonnet writes: “This [parallelism between Eucharist and Scripture] was certainly not done, as certain Fathers feared, in order to reduce the eucharistic presence to pure symbolism, nor with any intention of saying that the two presences are the same (for it is an analogy), but more in order to emphasize the reality of Christ’s presence in Scripture as inspired word.” “Chapters IV and VI of *Dei Verbum*,” 177.

³⁷ E.g., Ps 119:103; Pr 9:1–5; Sir 15:1–3; 24:18–21. For discussion, see Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 1.266–69, 272–74; Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to St. John*, 2.43–45.

the words of the prophets and Apostles.” Significantly, the conciliar text articulates all these actions performed by or pertaining to the Trinitarian persons with verbs in the present tense: the Father “meets” (*occurrit*) and “speaks with” (*eis sermonem confert*) his children; the Scriptures “impart” (*impertiant*) the Word; they “make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound” (*vocem Spiritus Sancti personare faciant*). The present tense verbs indicate that this encounter between the Triune God and the faithful takes place in the present activity of reading Scripture, “especially in the sacred liturgy.” Through the reading of Scripture, the faithful can experience the Father’s affection, receive his instruction and Word, and hear the Spirit’s voice speaking to them in their present moment.

Consistent with the preceding analysis of John’s Gospel, the conciliar text teaches that Scripture’s capacity to mediate a present encounter with the Triune God results from divine inspiration. The second sentence of §21 opens with an affirmation of Scripture and sacred Tradition as constituting “the supreme rule of faith.” The reason for this normativity lies in that the Scriptures “impart the Word of God Himself . . . and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles.” The conciliar text prefaces these claims about the Word and the Spirit’s speaking with a descriptive clause about the biblical books “as inspired by God (*a Deo inspiratae*) and committed once and for all to writing.” Divine inspiration encompasses both the subjective inspiration of the human authors (which *Dei Verbum* mentions most frequently) and the objective inspiration of biblical books.³⁸ So understood, the inspired Scripture does not only communicate truths from the inspired authors of the past, but they also mediate an encounter with God in the present, who speaks and acts through the inspired texts. Such an understanding squares with a traditional understanding of inspiration described by Henri de Lubac: “It is not only the sacred writers who were inspired one fine day. The sacred books themselves are and remain inspired . . . The Spirit immured himself in it, as it were. He lives in it. His breath has always

³⁸ *Dei Verbum* mentions inspiration on thirteen occasions, seven times for the subjective inspiration of human authors (§7, 9, 11 (x3), 14, 18), four times for the objective inspiration of biblical books (§8, 11b, 21, 24), and two times for God as the one who inspires (§16, 20).

animated it . . . It is full of the Spirit.”³⁹ Or as Denis Farkasfalvy likewise has written, “the chief effect of [such an understanding of inspiration consists] in the presence of a spiritual fullness in the biblical text, a capability to reveal not only truths but ultimately the One who said ‘I am the Truth.’”⁴⁰

Furthermore, *Dei Verbum* §21 teaches that this present encounter with the Triune God mediated by Scripture communicates causal power. The text speaks of “the force and power in the word of God (*verbo Dei vis ac virtus inest*),” a formulation that recalls both “the one table . . . of God’s word and Christ’s body” and Scripture’s ability to “impart the word of God Himself.” Consistent with its opening identification of Christ as “the bread of life,” *Dei Verbum* §21 expresses the power of God’s Word in language and imagery of food. The Word of God is “the food of the soul” and from it “the preaching of the Church must be nourished.” This spiritual nourishment gives “the strength of faith” and is “the support and energy of the Church.” The power of God’s word is life giving and life sustaining. It acts primarily on the faithful reader’s soul and through the soul to bodily activities (like preaching). The faithful are loved, instructed, energized, and nourished by the Triune God in the reading of Scripture because Scripture itself is a medium of divine presence and thus divine power.

A key statement in *Dei Verbum* §2 sheds further light on Scripture’s capacity to mediate God’s presence to its readers. The overarching concern of this article is divine revelation, which, as commentators have argued, is described in historical and sacramental terms.⁴¹ The section opens by speaking of revelation as God’s action “to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose (*sacramentum*) of His will” so as to draw human beings to participate in the divine communion. The third sentence in this article expounds on where and how “this economy

³⁹ Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3 vols., trans. Mark Sebanc and E. M. Maciejowski (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998–2009 [1959–61]), 1.81–82.

⁴⁰ Denis Farkasfalvy, O.Cist., “How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration?,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4 (2006): 249.

⁴¹ René Latourelle, S.J., *Theology of Revelation* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1966), 460–62; Joseph Ratzinger, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter I,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. William Glen-Doepel et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969 [1967]), 171.

of revelation" (*Haec revelationis oeconomia*) occurs: "This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them."⁴²

The conciliar text teaches that the economy of divine revelation occurs in both "deeds and words" (*gestis verbisque*). This distinction between words and deeds—or "works" (*opera*) and "realities" (*res*)—which are both means of divine revelation, along with the language of signification (*res verbis significatas*), evoke the traditional doctrine of the senses of Scripture. Thomas Aquinas thus defines the two basic biblical senses: "that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal and presupposes it."⁴³ It is therefore appropriate to take this statement as bearing on Scripture both in its language (*verba*) and that which the biblical language presents (doctrine and *res*).

Dei Verbum §2 suggests two ways in which Scripture can be seen as a quasi-sacramental vehicle of divine presence. The first pertains primarily to that which the biblical words present, that is, the biblical *res*. Within the divine economy, one of the key functions performed by the biblical text, its *verba*, is to "proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them." This claim that the deeds and realities in salvation history bear within themselves the divine mystery is highly redolent of Henri de Lubac's exposition of the spiritual sense. For de Lubac, the spiritual sense, or mystery, does not lie primarily in the words of the text or the human authors' ideas, but in the realities that the words present: "to discover this allegory [i.e., spiritual meaning], one will not find it properly speaking in the text, but in the realities of which the text speaks; not

⁴² The full Latin text reads: "Haec revelationis oeconomia fit gestis verbisque intrinsece inter se connexis, ita ut opera, in historia salutis a Deo patrata, doctrinam et res verbis significatas manifestent ac corroborent, verba autem opera proclamant et mysterium in eis contentum elucidant."

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 10; cited from St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947–48).

in history as recitation, but in history as event.”⁴⁴ He later adds, “the text acts only as spokesman to lead to the historical realities; the latter are themselves the figures, they themselves contain the mysteries that the exercise of allegory is supposed to extract from them.”⁴⁵

By speaking of “the mystery contained in [the deeds],” the conciliar text points to a sacramental dimension of the biblical *res*, the realities of salvation history proper. Commenting on *Dei Verbum* §2, Joseph Ratzinger states that this article gives “a sacramental view [of revelation], which sees law and grace, word and deed, message and sign, the person and his utterance within the one comprehensive unity of the mystery.”⁴⁶ Consistent with the theological vision inherent in the doctrine of the spiritual sense of Scripture, the realities (e.g., persons, things, events, states of affairs) presented by the biblical texts contain, veil, and reveal the divine mystery.⁴⁷ More specifically, this mystery is God’s plan of salvation in Christ in which all biblical realities in some respect participate. The account of the divine economy given in *Dei Verbum* §2 thus involves a notion of “economic participation” of all biblical *res* in the mystery of Christ.⁴⁸

A second way in which Scripture can be seen as a sacramental vehicle of divine presence in light of *Dei Verbum* §2 concerns the intrinsic relationship (*intrinsece inter se connexis*; translation mine) between the deeds and words, the signified and sign, in salvation history. Both the deeds and words in salvation history are revelatory and shed interpretive light upon each other. The words of the biblical text are revelatory in that through them, God delivers divine teaching and interprets the meaning of the realities in salvation history that the words present: “the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them.” These mystery-bearing realities of salvation history also “manifest and confirm” what the biblical words signify. René Latourelle argues that

⁴⁴ De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2.86.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.86.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” 171.

⁴⁷ See Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 154–60; William M. Wright IV, “The Literal Sense of Scripture According to Henri de Lubac: Insights from Patristic Exegesis of the Transfiguration,” *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 252–77.

⁴⁸ Francis Martin, “Election, Covenant, and Law,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4 (2006): 865.

this revelatory reciprocity between words and deeds is explicitly sacramental: “The sacramental character of revelation appears in the interpenetration and mutual support that exists between word and work. God performs the act of salvation and at the same time develops its meaning; He intervenes in history and tells us of the import of His intervention; He acts and comments on His action.”⁴⁹

As a fruit of divine inspiration, the Bible’s linguistic articulations, its *verba*, possess a privileged congruence with the divine actions and realities in salvation history, which they present and whose spiritual meaning they correctly interpret.⁵⁰ The biblical *verba* constitute that linguistic articulation and interpretation most befitting the disclosure of these sacred realities, having as it does an inspired, “intrinsic” relation with them. As Francis Martin has written of this passage in *Dei Verbum* §2, “The word that gives language expression to the action ensures that God’s act be rendered more intelligible and be continually present to God’s people.”⁵¹ He continues, “the biblical expression in ‘words’ has a unique capacity to transpose, express, and mediate the action, the *res*, or the *mysterion*.”⁵² The mystery-bearing *res* in salvation history are made present and their significance made known through the biblical *verba* (to which they are intrinsically connected) to receptive, faith-filled readers of Scripture.

This same passage from *Dei Verbum* §2 is also cited by Pope Benedict XVI in *Verbum Domini* §56, where he discusses Scripture in sacramental terms. Benedict writes, “The proclamation of God’s word at the celebration entails an acknowledgement that Christ himself is present, that he speaks to us, and that he wishes to be heard.”⁵³ According to Benedict,

⁴⁹ Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation*, 462.

⁵⁰ As Henri de Lubac puts it (referencing several authors), “It is the same Word of God, who on the one hand, ‘realizes the plans of God in history’ and on the other, ‘translates in human words, on the lips of God’s messengers, to make the meaning of this revelation through the realities understood.’” *La Révélation divine* in *Cardinal Henri de Lubac, Œuvres complètes IV*, ed. Éric de Moulins-Beaufort and Georges Chantaine (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2006), 68–69.

⁵¹ Francis Martin, “Revelation and Its Transmission,” in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 57.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* §56.

the liturgical proclamation of inspired Scripture is a kind of divine presence, analogous to Christ's Eucharistic presence: "Christ, truly present under the species of bread and wine, is analogously present in the word proclaimed in the liturgy."⁵⁴ He continues, referencing *Dei Verbum* §2, "A deeper understanding of the sacramentality of God's word can thus lead us to a more unified understanding of the mystery of revelation, which takes place through 'deeds and words intimately connected.'"⁵⁵

Conclusion

The analysis of John 20 has provided a Scriptural basis for conceiving of the Gospel in broadly sacramental terms as a vehicle of divine presence. John offers the written text of his Gospel as a linguistic means by which the reality of the risen Jesus can be encountered by later generations of the faithful. The Gospel has this unique capacity because the Beloved Disciple's testimony, which it contains, results from the activity of the Paraclete in the disciple. The inspired *verba* of the Gospel serve as a means by which the *res* that is the risen Lord is made truly present to its readers and whose spiritual significance, revealed to believers by the Paraclete, is communicated.

In addition to and in concert with the Scriptural teaching, *Dei Verbum* and *Verbum Domini* have provided a magisterial basis for thinking about Scripture as a vehicle of divine presence and power, which faithful readers can experience in their present. Both the biblical *res*, which bear the divine mystery, and the *verba*, which present and interpret those *res* in a most privileged and inspired way, have sacramental dimensions by which Jesus, the Word and Wisdom of God, feeds and sustains his disciples.

Further theological thinking about the sacramentality of Scripture requires consideration of how Scripture is both similar and dissimilar to the Church's seven sacraments. For instance, while Scripture does constitute a vehicle of God's presence and power, it cannot, in light of the teachings of Trent, be considered as an eighth sacrament of the Church.⁵⁶ As many Catholic theologians who advocate an understand-

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Cf. "Decree Concerning the Sacraments, Canon 1," in *The Canons and Decrees of the*

ing of Scripture in quasi-sacramental terms have rightly noted, Scripture's mode of making Christ present is not identical with his substantial presence in the Eucharist.⁵⁷ Instead, one might employ a broader notion of sacramentality with respect to Scripture, such as that employed by the Second Vatican Council when it applies the term "sacrament" to the Church herself.⁵⁸ In this way, a great deal of insight can be gained into the Church's traditional belief and acquire a renewed appreciation for the life-giving and life-sustaining power of God's Word given in the Scripture. For it is through the reading and hearing of inspired Scripture, especially within the context of liturgy, that its receptive readers can encounter the reality of the risen Lord and "by believing may have life in his name" (John 20:31). 

Council of Trent, trans. H. J. Schroeder, O.P. (Rockford: Tan Books, 1978 [1941]), 51.

⁵⁷ E.g., Luis Alonso-Schökel, S.J., *The Inspired Word: Scripture in the Light of Language and Literature*, trans. Francis Martin, O.C.S.O. (Montreal: Palm, 1965), 374; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989 [1960]), 17.

⁵⁸ *Lumen Gentium* §1, 9.