

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS



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Chapter 1

Why is Biblical Interpretation Necessary?

There are varieties of methods, criticisms, interpretations, approaches, and theologies in biblical and theological interpretations. It is very easy for anyone to get confused regarding the plurality of methods, approaches, interpretations, Biblical books are complex in their text, language, culture, and history. So a variety of competencies is needed to interpret them. All the methods, approaches, and theologies help us to better understand the deeper meaning of the biblical texts. It was in the search for the true meaning of these texts that theological hermeneutics developed. From the 17th century onwards we see the development of ‘Hermeneutics’ as an important and independent discipline in classical philology and interpretation in general. In contemporary philosophy and theology ‘Hermeneutics’ plays a vital role. This is mainly due to the influence of the works of Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur.

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There was a time when biblical interpretation was left entirely to theologians, historians, and philosophers. Now biblical interpretation is considered as an integral part of biblical studies. The Bible is not just an ancient text; it is the most translated of all books. It is sacred Scripture that was read in liturgical assemblies and was preached and commented upon for thousands of years by thousands of people. In our discussion we will look at these realities.

Terminology

The terminologies frequently used in Hermeneutics are explained in this section.

Hermeneutics

The term hermeneutics comes from the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, meaning ‘to interpret, translate, explain, declare’ and from nominal *hermeneutike* meaning [‘the art of’] interpretation’. Its Latin equivalent is the verb *interpretari*, from which comes the noun interpretation. Hence, hermeneutics reflects the Latin plural ‘*hermeneutica*’ meaning the science of interpretation.

The term “hermeneutics” is derived from the name of the god Hermes, who in Greek mythology acts as the messenger between the gods and human beings. In this process Hermes makes intelligible to human beings God’s message which otherwise is not intelligible to them. In Lystra, Paul was taken for Hermes (Acts 14:12) for between the crippled man and Barnabas it was Paul who spoke.

In the broader sense hermeneutics is the quest for meaning. In this broader context, the word *hermeneutic* has three meanings:

- a) Interpretation by *speech itself*: Language expresses and interprets what is in one’s mind or even that which constitutes one’s identity, being and person. In biblical discussion we have to deal with the capacity of human language to express God’s mind, will, and person.
- b) Interpretation through the *translation*: The process of translation from one language to another is a process that goes beyond the mechanical equivalents of words. It is concerned with the transference from one culture and worldview to another. This can also be a translation from an unintelligible language to an

intelligible one (*hermeneia of tongues*, in 1 Cor 12:10, is a charismatic gift with a revelatory dimension).

- c) Interpretation by *commentary and explanation*: It is a more formal aspect. Here the interpreter gives systematic comments and explanations on the texts.

In the narrower sense, *hermeneutics* refers to the principles, method, and techniques used to interpret written texts. The biblical *hermeneutical* theory is in contact with the philosophical reflection on *hermeneutics*, it has, however, assumed its own itinerary due to the special nature of the biblical texts as an inspired normative book of faith.

The function of the interpreter consists in seeking for “that meaning which the sacred writer, in a determined situation and given the circumstance of his time and culture intended to express and did in fact express through the medium of contemporary literary form” (DV 12). Inasmuch as the intention of the author is found in the sense of the text, we must try to find the sense present in the text, because it is what the sacred writer intended and did express. What is important is what the text actually says and not that which the author may have thought but did not write.

Exegesis

The Greek verb *Exegeomai* means to draw out, to develop, to explain. Thus exegesis explains the text of the scripture drawing out its message and significance.

Until recently hermeneutics meant a theoretical reflection on meaning as distinct from exegesis, an art where the rules detected in hermeneutics were applied practically. For us here, exegesis, refers to the analysis of a particular text of scripture to discover what the author wanted to say to his contemporaries, and hermeneutics refers to what the same text says to us today in a context different from the original one. Further, it is within the competence of hermeneutics to establish the principles, method, and techniques used to interpret written texts.

Why is Biblical Interpretation Necessary?

Often people say: “Just read the Bible and do what it says!” The problem with this attitude is that different people, even though they

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read the same Bible, come to very different conclusions about what it actually says! Many people also tend to think of the Bible as “God’s little instruction book for life.” While this statement has a kernel of truth – the Bible certainly does contain much teaching on how to live – it is far more than just an instruction manual. It is the written record of God revealing in history who He is, what He is like, who we are, what we are like, and what He expects of us. This is the overall message of the Bible in a nutshell. The necessity and goal of Biblical interpretation are explained below:

- ❖ The Bible was originally written to people who lived in a different place, in a very different culture, at a different time and period of history, and who spoke different languages. It also contains several different types of literature (called genres).
- ❖ Because the Bible is God’s word in history revealed to people in history, each passage has a historical context – an particular author, audience, purpose and occasion. On the other hand, since the Bible is also the word of God, its contents are also eternally relevant.
- ❖ The goal of interpretation is not to come up with the most unique interpretation (unique interpretations are usually wrong), but to discover the original intended meaning of a passage – the way the original audience understood it. The task of discovering the original intended meaning is called exegesis.
- ❖ The key to doing good exegesis is reading the text very carefully, paying close attention to the details it describes, and asking the text the right questions. This is critical to finding the correct interpretation. Bad interpretation results directly from bad exegesis.

The Present Need of Biblical Interpretation and the Problems

The scientific of the Scriptures has been facilitated especially since the early part of 19th century due to the following factors: a) the growth of related disciplines such as the comparative study of religions and the extra-biblical literature of Akkadia, Egypt, Canaan, Assyria and Babylon; b) renewed interest in the archaeology of the land of Palestine; c) growth in the philological studies of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek languages and their borrowing from other cultures; d) the beginning of the studies in the social science which allowed one to

build a broad framework by which the Bible could be investigated historically and thereby some of the enigmas of the past could be solved. The following are the various problems that make Biblical interpretation absolutely necessary.

Mythical Language

Due to the modern understanding of history and to the use of the historical method, there is a danger of recreating biblical history in man's own image. The ancient people expressed themselves in mythical categories. Israel lived in immediate proximity with this ambient and even borrowed much of the mythical material from her neighbours. One is reminded of these ideas: God presiding over a heavenly council with other deities (Ps 82); God being a heavenly warrior fighting a battle from heaven above for his people below (Ps 94); God dwelling on a holy mountain called Zion (Ps 46;48); God fighting and slaying the sea-monster typifying the chaos (Ps 74;89).

Many of the Psalms and the prophets who adopted liturgical material for their own purposes have to be seen at times as communicating truths on a mythical rather than on a historical level. Myth was an important vehicle to convey spiritual truths for the ancient mind. However, we must know that even though myth was certainly used in the biblical accounts, not everything can be described by them. A pan-mythical view can become as false as an estimation of the world-view of the biblical writers as can a pan-historical view. The positive consequence of this realization has been a proper caution in judging the value of mythical language with our modern-day mind set.

Contradictions and Repetitions in Biblical Accounts:

- i) In Gen 1:1-1:2:4a (P) and 2:4b-25 (J) we have two different orders of creation. They speak quite clearly of the different ways in which man and woman were created. In Gen 1 man is created as the pinnacle of creation in the image of God, after the creation of the natural order and the animal world; in Gen 2 man is created first out of the earth, to be followed by the animal kingdom, and then out of his rib woman is created.
- ii) In the floor stories (Gen 6-9), on the one hand, we read of 7 pairs of clean animals and a pair of unclean animals being taken into

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the ark (7:1-10), and the flood lasting for 40 days (7:12;8:6) before receding after two periods of 7 days; on the other hand, a few verses later we read that Noah took only two pair of each animal (7:8-9,15), and that the flood lasted 150 days (7:24), receding in another 150 days (8:3).

- iii) We also find doublets and repetitions on several different occasions: the Joseph story (Gen 37:28,36) narrates that he was sold first to the Ishmaelites and then to the Medianites and so was taken in different ways into slavery in Egypt.
- iv) There is a double version of the Decalogue: the Code of Alliance (Ex 20:1-17) and the Deuteronomic code (Dt 5:1-22).
- v) The Exodus narratives (Ex 14-15; Ps 78; 105) show different versions.
- vi) The accounts of the people entering the land are different: Joshua 1-12 speaks of a sudden conquest while Judg 1:1-2:5, of a difficult and protracted settlement.
- vii) The Judean kings, such as Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah, are presented in different lights in 2 Kgs 18-23 and in 2 Chr 29-35.
- viii) A typical interpretation of Jer 25:11-14 (Babylon: 70 years) is made by Daniel 9, which becomes the origin of the famous prophecy of the 70 weeks.

In the NT we also see different accounts of miracles, different records of parables, and different emphases (and often variant chronologies) of the events in the life of Jesus. Most significant ones are the different accounts of the resurrection appearances.

These examples show the existence of different traditions and also the attempts to interpret the tradition in new situations. The word of God is dynamic and is not fully exhausted in its proclamation by the prophet or its writing by the sacred author.

The Problem of Religious Language

The new understanding of the nature of religious language invites us to a cautious view regarding the one-sided historical research of the biblical accounts. In so far as it is trying to mediate not only earthly realities but also a transcendental reality, religious language

has reference points beyond this language with particular intensity (e.g., in the apocalyptic imageries used in the Gospels and in Revelation) into a category which goes well beyond history. Much of Scripture is couched in different types of religious language, and the recognition of the type which is being used (descriptive or prescriptive) can often suggest whether or not the material in which it occurs is to be understood historically.

The primary dimensions of language are literal, physical or material. To describe a reality or truth which is non-literal, spiritual and transcendental metaphor may be employed. Metaphors point to a reality that is beyond the literal/historical. Such a reading would provide us with the theological meaning (e.g., Christ as Lamb of God, the Prince of Peace, the Living Water, the Alpha and Omega, the King of Kings, and the Wisdom of God-obviously metaphorical language used to convey religious, spiritual insight beyond that which is literal).

There are Obscure and Difficult Passages in the Bible

Dan 9:2: Reading the prophecies of Jeremiah, Daniel pondered long over what they meant; Acts 8:26-35: The Ethiopian did not understand the passage of Is 53:7-8 and saw the need of an interpreter; 2 Pet 1:20-21: “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation...”; 2 Pet 3:16: Letters of Paul are difficult to understand (“There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures”).

Chapter 2

Text and the Process of Communication

The Bible contains texts almost 2950 years old, which were produced over a span of 1100 years. Even through the same methods and criteria used for the understanding of any ancient book are necessary and indispensable, for the Bible these are not sufficient. One must consider also the aspect of faith, as there are divinely inspired books of faith which are bequeathed to the Church as the norm and the nourishment of her life. So to understand the true significance that the Word of God is to have for us, we must also consider this added dimension in the interpretation of the biblical text.

Scripture reveals the will of God. Interpretation is essential in discerning this will. Moses, Prophets, Scribes, and many others have acted as interpreters of God's will. Jesus himself is the supreme interpreter and revealer of God's will. The NT writers interpreted the OT and the Christ Event. Even after the formation of the canon, the need for interpretation continued. Today, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church discerns the will of God as it is revealed in the Bible.

Phases of Biblical Interpretation

A discussion of biblical hermeneutics can be undertaken only against the background of a discussion of a general introduction to the Bible which includes a study of its inspiration, the unity of the Testaments, the Canon, the textual criticism, the manuscripts and the formation of the Bible, the history of biblical times, and the literary forms found in the Bible. Biblical interpretation follows from the understanding of the Bible as the Word of God expressed in the words of men. Therefore, our discussion must follow certain norms which account for this fact without overemphasizing or minimizing one or the other aspect.

Identification

Different literary genres (kinds of literature) are interpreted in different ways, so the first question to ask is: "To which category of literature does the text you are interpreting belong? Below are brief descriptions of the different genres found in the Bible:

Historical Narratives. These describe actual historical events from God's perspective. They tell us what God is like (His character and nature), what God likes/dislikes, how He deals with people who obey and honour Him, and how he deals with those who disobey and hate Him. Narratives give us principles and lessons, not commands, patterns or laws. Historical Narratives are found in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. In the New Testament, they can be found in parts of the Gospels, and the book of Acts.

Poetry and Songs. These are expressions of emotion to God. They allow us to express to God our feelings of happiness, joy, trust, hope, security, as well as feelings of discouragement, guilt, suffering, fear, anger, despair and repentance. They also assist us in expressing our love and appreciation for God or our need for forgiveness. Poetry and Songs allow us to relate to God on our own level. They show us how to communicate with God and how to honour and worship Him. In the Old Testament, these writings are found primarily in the Psalms and Song of Songs.

Legal Writings. These writings indicate God's high moral standard, His idea of justice, principles of common sense government, principles of common sense health and safety, and His pattern and

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order for acceptable worship. These laws are NOT directly applicable to Christians today i.e. they are not meant to be legalistic instructions and commands to Christians. Such legal writings can be found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Wisdom/Wise Sayings. These writings indicate God's view of wisdom as opposed to man's view of wisdom. They contain wise sayings, and practical advice on how to live life and avoid trouble and hardship. Wisdom literature can be found primarily in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job.

Prophecy. Prophecy is God's message to a particular person, a particular group of people and sometimes to all humanity. It is not necessarily foretelling the future – in fact the vast majority of prophecy in the Bible speaks of the present. Prophecy is found primarily in the Old Testament, from Isaiah to Malachi.

Teachings of Jesus. These are direct statements of truth from Jesus concerning the nature and character of God the kingdom of God/Heaven, what God expects of us, principles of righteous living, and the ways in which Jesus fulfils the OT prophecies. They are not exhaustive 'DOs and don'ts,' but rather, serve as examples and paradigms (patterns) from which we can derive underlying principles to apply in other situations. These teachings are found in parts of the Gospels i.e. Matthew - John.

Parables. Parables are stories with a punch-line. Parables are not so much illustrative, but rather, provocative. They are designed to draw people in and hit them with something unexpected, in the same way a joke does. Most parables have only one message or central idea, and even if multiple messages are present, one of them will be the chief idea. Note also that they are not perfect analogies! Parables are also found in parts of the Gospels.

Letters. These are generally occasional documents i.e. they were written with a clear purpose to a well-identified audience. However, some letters (called epistles) were written to a larger people group. The letter/epistle writer presents arguments to correct, rebuke, defend, instruct, praise and encourage their readers. Letters/epistles form the vast majority of the New Testament from Romans to Jude.

Apocalypse. This includes the book of Revelation, and also large parts of Ezekiel and Daniel. Revelation is a vision of warning and

encouragement to the early church as it was going through immense persecution.

Observation

The most important factor in exegesis is context. Understanding the context is the key to understanding what you are reading. Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart also point out “[t]he only proper control for hermeneutics is to be found in the original intent of the biblical text.”

There are two aspects of the context of a passage: the historical context and the literary context.

Historical Context. The Bible was written over a period of time dating from approximately 2000 BC (Job) to 95 AD (Revelation). It was set in a different country/continent and a vastly different culture and society from our own, therefore we must be careful not to make 20th century assumptions about the situation. Consult Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias and handbooks in order to find out about the manners and customs of the various nations at that time in history. Use your imagination and try to put yourself in the shoes of the people involved. Make observations about who? what? when? where? and how?

Literary Context. This is the position of the text you are reading in relation to other texts. What verses come before? What verses come after? What situation, event, statement or argument led up to this passage? What situation, event, statement or argument followed or resulted from this passage? What book is the text in? Whereabouts in the book? What testament is it in? Why is the text in this position? Why is it in the Bible at all? What difference would it make if it was left out? Following are some suggestions on making observations depending on the genre of the passage you are interpreting:

Historical Narratives. Choose a complete narrative and read it in a single sitting. Make (mental) notes as you are reading, and ask: What is happening? To whom? When? Where? Why? (The most important question!) What can I learn about God? What can I learn about the other characters involved?

Poetry and Songs. Read a complete Psalm or Song in one sitting, taking (mental) notes as you are reading. What is being said about God? What is being said about humanity? Is the writer pleading for

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something? Are they pouring their heart out? If so, about what? Are they praising God? Are they angry with God? What mood does the writer seem to be in? Joyful? Happy? Angry? Fearful? Anxious? Distraught? Discouraged? Does the writer's mood change?

Legal Writings. Read a collection of related rules/regulations in one sitting. What rules/regulations are being put in place? Why? What situations/circumstances do they cover? Are they for moral reasons or are they concerned with administration/ government and personal hygiene? Can you see any pattern being established? Is a feast, offering or ceremony being described? If so, what seems to be its purpose or significance? Never stop asking Why?

Wisdom. Read as much of Proverbs/Job/Ecclesiastes as you can in one go, taking (mental) notes as you read. Consider what you think the central message of the text is. What advice is given? What warnings are given? What comparisons are made? Compare the proverb you are reading with other similar or related proverbs (similar or related proverbs could be anywhere in the book of Proverbs). If there are similar/related proverbs, how do the proverbs differ? Do they relate to slightly different situations? Do they address different aspects of a problem or situation? If two proverbs say the opposite thing (and there are several) why would this be? Do you think the statement made or the advice given is good? Why or why not? You must also remember that proverbs are not always globally applicable to every person and every situation. They are guidelines and "rules of thumb," not absolute rules, statements of fact or direct promises.

Prophecy. Read a single prophecy (called an "oracle") in one sitting. Try and establish the historical setting. What circumstances in history provoked this prophetic word from God? What does it say about God? Is the prophecy positive or negative? Is it a warning? About what? Is it a condemnation? For what? Is it an encouragement or a message of hope? About what? Is it a promise? To do what? Prophecy is some of the hardest literature to read. Knowing the historical context is essential to really to appreciate what is being said. It may be necessary to consult a commentary or Bible handbook if you are struggling.

Teachings of Jesus. Read a complete section of teaching (called a "pericope") in a single sitting, taking (mental) notes about what is

being taught. What message is He communicating? What subject is He talking about? What is He actually saying about it? Is it a command? Is it a warning? Is it an exhortation/encouragement? Is it a promise? Does it give us a better understanding of who God is? Does it give us a better understanding of what we are like?

Parables. Read a single parable and the surrounding dialogue in one sitting. Try to determine the central thought of the parable. What message is it communicating? Keep in mind the context. This is a big clue to identifying the central thought. What events prompted Jesus to tell this parable? How did the hearers react to it? Did they understand it? Focus on the central thought - don't focus on all the minute details - they are not meant to be important. Read ahead - some parables are interpreted for you by Christ later on in the gospel.

Letters. Read them like any other letter. Start at the beginning - stop at the end. If possible, read a letter right through in one sitting. Identify the major issues/arguments of the letter. Focus on one of the major issues/arguments. What is the point of each paragraph? What does each paragraph contribute to the current issue/argument? Why did the writer include a particular paragraph? What difference would it make if it were not included? Don't pay too much attention to the chapter and verse divisions or the chapter headings - they're not inspired! Words/phrases such as "Now about", "Concerning" and "Finally" often indicate a change of argument/subject.

Apocalypse. Read the books of Daniel and Ezekiel first. Revelation uses lots of imagery from these books. Identify as much as possible, the use of imagery (by comparing Revelation with Daniel and Ezekiel). What is the imagery used to communicate in Revelation? What kind of message is being communicated? Hope? Encouragement? Warning? What does the text say about God and about Jesus Christ? What does it say about Satan? What does it say about the Church (New Jerusalem)? You will definitely want to consult some good commentaries in these matters. Revelation is the most difficult book in the Bible to read and understand.

Prayer, Meditation & Wrestling

Prayer, meditation and wrestling are things the reader should do throughout the entire interpretive cycle, not just before you begin or when you are about to deliver your talk/sermon/speech.

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Meditation does not mean emptying your head of everything – quite the opposite in fact. It means filling your mind with all the information required to make decisions about what the text says, how significant it is and how it should be applied today. When looking at a difficult passage, you may need to really pray about, and wrestle with, the various alternatives.

Determining Meaning

What do the particular key words or phrases mean? Pay attention to those elements that are repeated in the current passage or used elsewhere by the same author.

What is the significance of a particular key word, phrase or sentence? Does the element carry any special significance given the historical and social context? What does it contribute to the overall meaning of the text? How would the meaning of the text be effected if this particular element was left out?

Application

Is there a command to obey? Is there an error to avoid? Does the passage point out sinful behavior or attitudes that may be present in your own life? Is there an example to follow? Is there a promise to claim? Does the passage highlight an aspect of God's nature and character which you had not seen before?

Presuppositions & Pre-understandings

No-one is ever completely unbiased. Every understanding presuppose pre-understanding or prejudice. In other words every process of understanding is gripped or conditioned by a prior structure of experiences. In hermeneutics, pre-understanding or prejudice is not something that is negative, but it is the necessary condition which makes understanding possible. In terms of hermeneutics, pre-understanding or prejudice may be described as a body of assumptions and attitudes which a person brings to the perception and interpretation of reality or any aspect of it. From this perspective it is very difficult to think of uniform understanding or knowledge, because understanding varies from person to person in accordance with his or her pre-understanding or prejudice.

Classical philosophers and theologians also acknowledge the role of pre-understanding. For example, Immanuel Kant admits some sort

of pre-understanding in relation to perception. He insists in *The Critique of Pure Reason* that we have no certain knowledge of things in themselves but our mind give shape to them. According to Heidegger, understanding always touches on the whole constitution of being-in-the-world. He asserts further that the meaning does not lie in words; or in things, but in the remarkable structure of understanding itself. Rudolf Bultmann a renowned theologian has rightly remarked that every interpretation incorporates a particular prior understanding.

Now the question is “From where does the pre-understanding come?” or “How we possess a particular pre-understanding?”. As we know generally pre-understanding comes from one’s own environment. Then, “what do we mean by environment?”. Environment is a composite of several factors. It includes historical factors, psychological factors, economical factors, political factors, religious factors, social and family relationships, affiliation to group and associations, vocational status, educational

Another two questions that might be raised in relation to pre-understanding are the following (1) “Is pre-understanding common?” And (2) “Is pre-understanding static?”. To the first question answer is both in affirmative and negative. On the one hand, pre-understanding is common in the sense that everybody has pre-understanding. On the other hand, pre-understanding is not common in the sense that the content of the pre-understanding differs from person to person. From the viewpoint of hermeneutics the second question can be answered only in negative. That is to say, pre-understanding is not static. Our pre-understanding is subject to change in every moment of our lives. As our environmental conditions change our pre-understanding also undergo change or transformation.

There are different types of pre-understandings. To have an overview of the different types of pre-understanding, a classification of the same would be appropriate. However, the divisions in this classification overlap each other, for we cannot compartmentalize them exhaustively. Actually what we do here is this, we approach the phenomenon of prejudice from different angles. Accordingly we have four types of pre-understandings.

i) Informational Pre-understanding. It refers to the information that one already possesses about any given subject prior to

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approaching it. This is pre-understanding of the most basic kind. Terms such as prepossession and to a degree, preconception, prenotion, and predetermination are related to informational pre-understanding.

ii) Attitudinal Pre-understanding. This type of pre-understanding refers to the disposition with which one approaches something or the disposition that one brings to a given subject. The related terms are predisposition, prejudice, bias, life-hearing and life-relation.

iii) Ideological Pre-understanding. It indicates the ideological affiliation with which a person approaches something. This category would include both a general aspect and a particular aspect. The general aspect of the ideological pre-understanding points out the way one views the total complex of reality. And the particular aspect of the ideological pre-understanding shows the way one views a specific subject. The terms like worldview, life-attitude, life-posture, frame of reference, framework, horizon of understanding, etc. belong to the general aspect of the ideological pre-understanding and of view, viewpoint, perspective, stand point ,etc. belong to the particular aspect of the ideological pre-understanding.

iv) Methodological Pre-understanding. This category refers to the actual approach which one takes in the explication of a given subject. For instance, a sociologist approaches something with a methodology proper to sociology a historian approaches an event with a methodology proper to history, and so on. In one sense, the methodological pre-understanding does function in the same way as any other type of pre-understanding and does influence the result of the interpretation. Yet in another sense, the methodological pre-understanding is considered as a tool that avoids the influences of other types of pre-understanding.

We shall conclude our pre-understanding or prejudice by listing how it influence our interpretation and understanding or how does it function in terms of interpretation and understanding.

(1) Pre-understanding may function as either a negative or positive influence on interpretation. It negatively influences our interpretation by distorting or misleading our perception of things. It positively influences our interpretation, as it is the necessary precondition or frame of reference to understanding something.

(2) Pre-understanding may influence our interpretation either in a comprehensive or in a limited manner. A pre-understanding comprehensively influence one's interpretation when it influences the way one views the total sphere of reality and a pre-understanding influences one's interpretation in a limited manner when it influences the way one views fragments of it.

(3) Pre-understanding may influence our interpretation either dependently or independently. A pre-understanding may influence on one's interpretation when he or she has one comprehensive pre-understanding that contains within it a number of more limited presuppositions. A pre-understanding functions as an independent influence on one's interpretation when a person is having limited pre-understanding on different subjects.

(4) Pre-understanding may influence our interpretation consistently or inconsistently. If a pre-understanding functions in a similar manner without fail in all the instances of a specific domain, it influences our interpretation consistently.

(5) Pre-understanding may influence our interpretation consciously, or unconsciously. When a person is aware of the pre-understanding that is at work in his or her interpretation, that pre-understanding is consciously influencing his or her interpretation. When the situation becomes just the contrary, the pre-understanding influences one's interpretation unconsciously.

(6) Pre-understanding may function as either a major or a minor influence on our interpretation. If a pre-understanding exerts a major influence on our interpretation. When a pre-understanding determines the conclusions drawn by a person only on a small scale, that pre-understanding is having only minor influence on our interpretation.

(7) Pre-understanding may influence our interpretation rationally or irrationally. If a pre-understanding is formed out of the sound interaction with one's own environment, it will influence his or her interpretation rationally. Whereas, if a pre-understanding is the outcome of some panic or neurotic reactions, it will influence our interpretation irrationally.

(8) Finally, pre-understanding may be open-ended or closed. If a pre-understanding gives room for further correction and alteration,

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it is an open-ended pre-understanding. If a pre-understanding does not admit any correction or alternation, it is a closed pre-understanding.

No understanding takes place in isolation. Understanding is not knowing the individual words in a sentence or in a text and their meanings separately, because individual words in a sentence or in a text cannot convey the fullness of its meaning. A text is a web, a well-knit frame in which different words are structured properly. Furthermore, understanding is a whole system of interrelated beliefs and practices. Hence understanding happens only when we realize the interconnections that exist between the words of a sentence or of a text. Then understanding is holistic.

If hermeneutics is taken in its wider sense, that is, not merely as formal rules controlling the practice of exegesis but as something concerned with the total process of understanding, then biblical hermeneutics can only be developed as part of an all encompassing theory of communication. In its most basic form, communication can be described as the interaction between sender, message and receiver.

There are three contexts in which each text needs to be considered: a) the world that precedes the text; b) the world of the text itself; and c) the world that follows the text.

In the biblical texts, the message/medium is the written word. The text represents the solidification of a previous encounter between sender (Moses/Jesus) and receiver (Israel/Disciples). In the process of becoming a written text, the message may pass through various stages (oral tradition, pre-literary forms, etc.), but the text also represents the first stage in the process of reinterpretation. The reinterpretation has as its aim a new communication event this time between the texts and the contemporary receiver. In the case of biblical texts, the original sender is no longer present and interpretation necessarily comes out of the interaction between the text and receiver.

Today's main hermeneutical problem arises from the knowledge that every human expression, whether literary or artistic, religious or philosophical, contains a set of meanings given to it by the author, and when this set of meanings moves into the world of another subject, it must be interpreted in such a way as to convey the original intention of the author.

In practice, the texts mediate between two events: the one which produced the text (the prophet, the audience, the scribes etc. come into the picture) and the one flowing from interaction with the text (the reader, the interpreter etc.). Certain considerations are to be made when dealing with the biblical material:

1. The biblical texts are historical in a double sense: a) They are historical documents in their own right, with their own history of composition, tradition, and preservation b) They also refer to certain specific historical events (e.g. Monarchy, Exile).

2. The present reader is not the first reader of the text. The text, enriched by the redactors, is the text for interpretation.

3. Clarity concerning the purpose and the context in which the reading takes place is important. The kerygmatic or proclaiming nature of the text presupposes a new understanding as the ultimate goal of the reading. It is the interpretative community of believers who constitute the context of such a reading.

4. Although the text is dependent on prior readings, the text itself functions as a separate entity within the interpretation process.

5. As the original author is not present, the interpretative interaction takes place between the text and (present) reader. The present text is both the end of the process of text production and the beginning of the process of reinterpretation.

6. Understanding the original speech event is the prerequisite for its appropriation in the contemporary situation.

The process of reading and interpreting the Bible should be cyclic. A reader approaches a passage of scripture with presuppositions (e.g. the Bible is the inerrant word of God) and usually has a pre-understanding about what the particular passage can or cannot mean. These presuppositions and pre-understandings, along with the context, influence the reader's understanding of the passage, and help them derive their interpretation. This interpretation then effects the reader's presuppositions, and becomes part of their pre-understandings the next time they read this passage. If our exegetical information, reasoning and judgments are thought through again and reassessed each time we go through the cycle then the accuracy and correctness of our interpretation will improve.

Early Biblical Interpretation

Israel has always re-interpreted Scripture in the light of new problems and new exigencies, and even the re-interpretations became part of the Scripture. The literary formation of many of the books shows that biblical literature has in fact developed through the contribution of such re-interpretations. For instance, the Yahwistic history of the patriarchs and Moses of the 10th cent. is taken up and re-narrated in the 6th cent. in the manner and according to the theology of the priestly (P) author.

In many aspects the *Deuteronomic Code* (Deut 12-26) is a re-interpretation, an actualization, and adaptation of the Elohist's 'Code of the covenant' (Ex 20:22-23:3), reflecting the changes in the economic and social aspects of the settled life of Israel in the land of Canaan. These changes were characterized by the divine rights upon the land and the people, the preference of the weak, and the poor who have to be protected. It reflects the Deuteronomic theology.

The book of Ben Sirach is often an existential reflection on the ancient texts: Sir 3 is a comment on the

4th commandment; Sir 15 is a comment on Gen 3; Sir 17:1-12, on creation (Gen 1); Sir 34;21-35:4 reviews the theme of cult and social justice.

In prophetic literature one can see the superimposition of the interpretation of the original oracles, for example, in the re-interpretation of the exodus (see Is 40:1-11; 17-20; Ps 78;105). In all these, one can detect the meaning sense of the Scriptures which reveals both their ancient and new character at the same time. The sense looked for is not exactly the one which was understood by the first readers; rather, what is looked for is that meaning the current reader can discover in view of his contemporary problems and in the light of the revelation taking place in the time between the ancient writer and the present reader. What is treated is the actualization of the ancient books, which in Judaism took the form of *midrash*.

Judaism of Inter-Testamental Period

The Synagogue and rabbinic school were the ambient wherein the biblical interpretation thrived in Judaism. This reading of the Torah, called *darash*, meaning investigation/research, is aimed at bringing the meaning of the text up-to-date. The homily and the paraphrasing translation (*targum*) of the text were the means of actualizing interpretation. The rabbinic schools tried to adapt the Law to the changed circumstance. Their authorized interpreters were the *soferim* ‘the doctors of the law’ – scribes (Sir 39:1-8) who many times appear in the NT passages (Mt 23; 13:52). They have also left traces in some of the biblical comments found in Qumran.

The interpretations of the Sadducees and Pharisees were different. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, both Qumran and the Sadducees declined in importance, while the pharisaic movement survived. In the interpretation of specific texts, the rabbis employed certain rules, which were authentic hermeneutical principles.

Targumim: an Aramaic translation often interpretative of the Hebrew Scriptures. It was first oral and then written.

Midrashim: commentary on scripture, often in homeiletic form. The term ‘midrash’ comes from the term *darash* (= to seek) and we can distinguish a four-fold meaning: a) a literary form (genre) which uses the biblical text with great freedom (e.g., the midrash of the book

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of Wisdom on the book of Exodus); b) a literary form which treats biblical personalities with great liberty, presenting them as historical, although they are either mythological or fictional (e.g., the books of Tobias, Judith, Esther, Jonah and narrative section of the book of Job, etc); c) those Jewish literary works, called *midrashim*. Which are homiletic or exegetical comments on different books of the Bible; d) Midrash a term which is also applied to the research method used, by the Jewish exegetes. Thus *Midrashim* includes the totality of principles, techniques, and procedures used by the Jews in the interpretation of Scripture. Midrash is both hermeneutical and theological in nature.

Midrash has two Divisions: a) *Halakah* b) *Haggadah*

Halakah: *Halakah* is a commentary on scripture which deals with legal texts (plural *halakot*. *halakah* comes from *halak*, to walk), and therefore, ‘the rule of be having’ or ‘norm’. Usually translated as ‘law’, it denotes a specific ruling, a legal statement or discussion, the general category of legal material which provides rules for moral, juridical, and ritual conduct.

Haggadah: It is narrative commentary on Scripture which deals with morals, ethics, and daily life. The term *haggadah* is derived from the Hebrew root *ngd* ‘to show, announce, tell, testify, declare, make known’. *Haggadah* mainly explains the historical and prophetic sections of the OT, enriching them with legendary motifs with a moral scope. It deals with the non-legal text in rabbinic literature.

Pesharim: It is a type of line-by-line interpretation often allegorical. In the Qumran, one read the ancient biblical text and applied it to the present, introducing the comment with the words: ‘its interpretation is.’, where the Hebrew word for interpretation is *pesher* (*pesharim*; ‘explanation’) and it occurs only once (Ecc 8:1) in the OT. Until the Qumran discoveries this was an unknown type of biblical interpretation. It is used in the sense of interpretation and realization. Now this word is used to signify: a) a Qumran biblical commentary written in *pesharim*-like form; b) the formal term used to introduce the expository section of this kind of commentary; c) the literary genre of these commentaries; and d) the particular exegetical method of the Qumran commentaries.

All these were attempts at actualization of the biblical texts. Elements of the halakic and haggadic modes of interpretation can be

seen in the NT. For us Jewish interpretation is especially helpful to understand the interpretation of the Hebrew text of the Bible. To these typically Jewish principles of interpretation we can also add the allegorical method. This method, which is of Greek origin, was used particularly by Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BC-50 AD) to adapt the Hebrew Bible to the Hellenistic culture of his time. The Christian interpretation of the Alexandrian school followed the allegorical method.

New Testament Interpretation of the OT

Jesus is the true and definite exegesis of the Father: “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (Jn 1:18). The Gospels show Jesus as the interpreter: “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Lk 24:27). He does not simply explain the Scriptures, but he reveals their sense because they speak of him (Jn 5:39,46). The Scriptures reach their fulfillment in him (Jn 19:28-30) and the newness of his teaching (Mk 1:27) and authority (Mk 1:22) are in tune with the fulfillment theme.

The exegesis of the apostolic Church, especially St. Paul (see Gal 4:21-31-the two wives of Abraham), draws from the rabbinic and Alexandrian sources, halakah, haggada, peshet and allegory.

In interpreting the Scriptures, Jesus used the interpretation techniques and methods of his time. Discussing divorce, for instance, he bases himself on Gen 2:24 with a new halaka. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” Mt 19:6, thus declaring that the Mosaic law and rabbinic tradition which tolerated it has ended. On the discussion of the resurrection (Mt 22:23-32) he appeals to Ex 3:6 (“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”) arguing in the haggadic manner that “He is God not of the dead, but of the living”. In his discussion with the scribes he uses the rabbinic style of argumentation (see Jn 10:34-36).

The NT authors also made use of the interpretation processes of the Jewish people of their time. In addition to the already existing elements of interpretation, the authority of the Word of God and its richness, they introduced something radically new: the fulfillment of the OT in Jesus. The NT interpretation of the OT has its basis in Jesus as the Messiah the Son of God.

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The aim of the NT authors was not to present a chronicle of Jesus' life. Rather, they presented the life of Jesus in such a way that it appealed to the faith of the people, and the Christ Event, with its culmination at Pentecost. Stood as the key to their interpretation. For them Christ is the New Adam, the New Moses, and the Church becomes the New Israel and the Christ Event is the New Exodus. The book of Hebrews uses typological midrash. Jesus is greater than Moses (Heb 4); Jesus is the great high priest (Heb 4-8); Earthly and heavenly sacrifice (Heb 9); Jewish law as a type (Heb 10:1)

Early Church

The early Church interpreted the OT by using the Christological key as she considered Christ to be the fulfillment and the point of arrival of the OT. Hence, while interpreting the OT, their primary intention was not to understand the original Hebrew text but to understand Christ. And their interpretations were not in Hebrew. There are various models of interpretation that the early church and the later Church fathers used for interpretation:

Typological Interpretation: Some reality or personage of the OT is seen as the type of Christ or of the Church (antitype). (See Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 10:6-1 Pet 3:22).

Literal Interpretation: It Looks for the Explicit Sense of the Text

Spiritual Interpretation: Its aim is to understand the hidden meaning of the text. It has its roots in 2 Cor 3:15: "Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed". Here Paul never intended to contrast between the OT and the NT or between the literal sense and the spiritual sense, although by the 3rd century, it is in this way that this text was made, the spiritual sense came to include both prophetic and typological meanings.

Allegorical Interpretation: Allegorical interpretation seeks something other than the 'surface' (literal) meaning. This meaning is 'deeper or hidden'. The letter to the Hebrews is a classical example of this type of interpretation.

Pedagogical Interpretation: The Law was intended to lead to Christ (Gal 3:24) – a task now completed.

Fulfillment Interpretation: The OT promises and prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, especially the messianic and eschatological prophecies.

Historical-salvific Interpretation: This was used by Paul in Rom 9-11 to indicate that God has not changed his way of acting in calling the gentiles.

Apocalyptic Interpretation: This used the OT as a source of allusion to build a Christian apocalyptic vision with the Risen Christ at the centre.

The early church fathers, using quotes from the OT and NT, also added their own interpretations. These had a literal and allegorical sense, as well as polemical and apologetic motives.

Ancient Christian Schools of Interpretation

Theological School of Alexandria

In Alexandria, Philo had already made great use of Greek philosophy to interpret Sacred Scripture as the voice of the Divine Logos, and the Gospel as the fulfillment, or actualization of the law. For the Alexandrian school, the interpretation of the Bible proceeded on two levels: a) the immediate comprehension of the text; b) the hidden or more profound sense of the text, to discover this allegory is indispensable. The Alexandrians considered the historical narrations as pure allegory (e.g. the 30 stages of the exodus of the Israelites in Num 33 are for Origen the successive moments the Christian soul has to pass through from sin to God). Origen (182-254), the greatest exponent of this school, made hermeneutics a proper and true science.

In particular this school tried to find the corporal (*somatikos*) sense (=literal sense) which could be adapted to the simple and uneducated reader, and the psychic or moral (*psychikos*) sense which was suited for those who were advancing in perfection, and the spiritual or mystical (*pneumatikos*) sense meant for the perfect. This system was applied above all to the OT, so that all the personalities and events of the OT were messianically interpreted.

In the allegorical interpretation we see a profound reverence for the Scripture and a desire to find its manifold depth. To this end they used the symbolic method, often disregarding the common significance

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of the words and resorting to all sorts of speculation. The most important contribution of the Alexandrian school was that of underlining the unity of both the testaments through the allegorical method. This method would reach its maximum influence in the medieval theory of the four senses.

Antiochean School of Syria

The Antiochean School had a hermeneutics much different from that of the Alexandrian school. The Antiocheans interpreted the texts principally using: a) literal sense and b) historical and grammatical sense. The true head and the most important figure of this school was Diodore of Tarsus (+ before 394). For him and for the Antiocheans the fundamental sense is the literal sense, but some events or personalities or realities can also have typical sense and prefigure the messianic gifts. The literal sense, which is unique, opens itself to a new and more profound reality, even though it is not independent of it. Perception of this typical sense was 'theory' or 'vision'. John Chrysostom (344-407), Theodore of Mopsuestia (350ca - 428), and Theodore of Cyr (+458) were representatives of this school. The great merit of this school is that it gave a scientific basis for biblical exegesis.

Hearing and Seeing the Word of God

The phrase “biblical criticism” often sounds negative to many people. Properly speaking, biblical criticism is the application of the disciplines of philosophy, literature, history and science to the critical study of the Bible. F. F. Bruce wrote in the 1970’s, “The value of these critical methods of Bible study lies in their enabling the reader to interpret the writings as accurately as possible.”¹ There are three obstacles that stand in the way of correctly interpreting the biblical writings: We speak a different language, we live approximately two millennia later, and we bring different expectations to the text. Additionally, Barr suggests that we approach the reading of the Bible with significantly different literary expectations than those in reading other forms of literature and writing.

First Stage: The history of biblical hermeneutics originates with distinctions in the Greek-Hebrew means of cognition:

- ♦ **The Greek “Seeing Culture:”** The Greek philosophers were among the first to understand the

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new power of the written word. Plato did not just hear words; he saw them. He knew words as ideas, detached from life and taking on a life of their own. Our word idea comes ultimately from the Greek word “to see.” Our word theory comes from the Greek word *theoria*, meaning ‘a sight’ (of something seen). An idea is a concept you can see in your mind.

- ♦ **The Hebrew “Hearing Culture:”** Unlike the Greeks, however, the Hebrews did not develop analytical thinking. Israel was a nation of prophets, not philosophers. Prophets listen to God. Philosophers envision. For the Greek philosopher, intellectual understanding came through the eye. For the Hebrew prophet, it came through the ear. The eye sees and dissects. The ear, on the other hand, hears and obeys. The logic of the Hebrew scriptures is the logic of revelation.

The Seeing and Hearing Cultures Intersect: Eventually Greek “seeing” culture and the Hebrew “hearing” culture met each other. Philo a Hellenistic Jew from Alexandria, tried to bridge the gulf between Hebrew and Greek thinking. He would use allegory as one such bridge. Allegory was a way of understanding Scripture that sought deeper meanings behind literal texts. Philo felt that allegory was the way that the Greek mind, with its thoughts about an ideal realm of reason and logic, and the Hebrew mind, with its thoughts of heaven, could connect.

Second Stage: The Patristic Era (Alexandrian and Antiochian Schools)

From 100- 400 A.D., the heart of the patristic era, the seeing and hearing cultures both existed within the church. Those who thought with the logic of revelation sought to hear God’s Voice in the text, but those who thought with the logic tried to analyze the text as well.

- ♦ The “hearing” culture predominated over the “seeing” culture. When the people read the Bible, they sensed there had to be something more than just words on paper. They expected to experience the Living God in the text.
- ♦ A difference began to arise in their minds between a “spiritual” (reading the Bible in such a way as to listen to and experience the Voice of God) and a “literal” (reading of the written words without having an experience of the Person of God) reading of a text.

- ♦ In Alexandria, Origen and his followers played freely with allegory, following Philo's example. Allegorical excesses came to plague biblical studies for centuries. Notable exegetes of the time included Origen of Alexandria, the great allegorist (c. 185-254). In the eastern Mediterranean there was Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428) and John Chrysostom (c. 345-407)
- ♦ Attempts were made at historical criticism during the patristic era. The exegetes of ancient Antioch, are the champions of a historical-grammatical approach in the ancient world.² The notable exegetes of the West are Ambrose (c. 340-397), Jerome (c. 340-420), Augustine (354-430) and Gregory the Great (c. 540-604).
- ♦ Although the church remained suspicious of philosophy, this is not to suggest that it lacked great minds - individuals like Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome were all great intellectual leaders. These leaders all shared the belief that the logic of grammar is not the same as the logic of revelation. Their attitude toward reason, therefore, was one of faith seeking understanding.

Third Stage: The Medieval Period

After the fall of Rome in 410 AD, the church entered into a long, lackluster era of intellectual demise. The collapse of Rome and the ensuing chaos created a widespread ignorance of the Bible in the West. This dire situation would last until the 11th century, when greater stability began to take root in western Europe.

- ♦ Spiritual reformers such as the Waldensians arose in the 12th century A.D.; Saint Francis in the 13th; Johannes Eckhart, Johannes Tauler and Heinrich Suso in the 14th, and John Wycliffe and John Huss in the 14th-15th centuries.
- ♦ At first philosophy was merely the tool of theology. But by the thirteenth century philosophy became the rival of faith, not just its slave. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) attempted to harmonize the two worldviews of Christianity and Aristotle. He developed a Christian theology based on the philosophy of Aristotle.
- ♦ By the end of the medieval period the "seeing" culture and the "hearing" culture both had become stronger and began to form

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themselves into competing worldviews. Faith increasingly began to rely on revelation to justify itself while the philosophers claimed the empirical world for themselves.

Fourth Stage: The Reformation

When the Reformation arose in 1520, the Reformers firmly rejected Aquinas' mingling of faith and philosophy. Instead, the Reformers based their theology solely on the biblical revelation. In this way the Reformation represents a triumph of the church's "hearing" culture over its "seeing" culture.

The invention of the movable printing press and the emergence of humanism are the important phenomena of this period. The printing press caused the power of the written word to be experienced by more people than ever before. The printing press had an enormous effect in weakening Europe's oral culture and in strengthening the emerging literate culture. The humanists were interested in the literal, historical dimensions of the biblical text. In general, the Reformers' insistences on biblical Hermeneutics were the following:

- ◆ The Bible is a means of grace through which God can speak.
- ◆ The Holy Spirit illumines the text for all Christians, not just for church officials.
- ◆ All Christians should read the Bible to hear God's Voice for their lives.
- ◆ Interpretations should be tested in the church community to guard against subjectivism.
- ◆ The literal meaning of the text should be studied to protect against subjectivism.
- ◆ General education enables people to read the Bible.
- ◆ Catechetical instruction fosters Bible reading by teaching the essentials.

The Puritans (John Owen) and the Pietists - Philipp Spener (1635-1705) and August Francke (1663-1727) - were concerned for spiritual hermeneutics as argued by the reformists. In summary, the Reformers achieved a balance between listening to God's Voice in the text (illumination), and an objective study of the literal meaning of the text (critical scholarship).

In order to refute the reformists the Catholic Church listed a number of principles guiding Roman Catholic hermeneutics, which are still valid as they are reflected in the magisterial teachings of the post-modern period:

- ♦ **Historico-Grammatical Interpretation** - The meaning of the literary expression of the Bible is best learned by a thorough knowledge of the languages in which the original text of Scripture was written, and by acquaintance with the Scriptural way of speaking, including the various customs, laws, habits and national prejudices which influenced the inspired writers as they composed their respective books. John Paul II said that: “A second conclusion is that the very nature of biblical texts means that interpreting them will require continued use of the historical-critical method, at least in its principal procedures. The Bible, in effect, does not present itself as a direct revelation of timeless truths but as the written testimony to a series of interventions in which God reveals himself in human history. In a way that differs from tenets of other religions [such as Islam, for instance], the message of the Bible is solidly grounded in history (PBC -6).
- ♦ **Christocentrism:** God is real and is incarnated in our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything pertaining to the Scriptures must be understood Christologically. He is the only gate through which we may enter into understanding of the Bible.
- ♦ **Ecclesial Dimension of the Scripture:** Only within the community of the Church can the Bible be understood. It was written by the Church, in the Church and for the Church. Thus, it is a “family document” which is the highest point of Holy Tradition (St. Basil, *On the Spirit* 66).
- ♦ **Catholic Interpretation** - Because the Catholic Church is the official custodian and interpreter of the Bible, Catholicism’s teaching concerning the Sacred Scriptures and their genuine sense must be the supreme guide of the commentator. The Catholic commentator is bound to adhere to the interpretation of texts which the Church has defined either expressly or implicitly.
- ♦ **Inerrancy** - Since God is the principal Author of Sacred Scripture, it can be claimed to contain no error, no self-contradiction. According to Pope John Paul II, “Addressing men and women,

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from the beginnings of the Old Testament onward, God made use of all the possibilities of human language, while at the same time accepting that his word be subject to the constraints caused by the limitations of this language. Proper respect for inspired Scripture requires undertaking all the labors necessary to gain a thorough grasp of its meaning (*PBC -6*).

- ♦ **Patristics** - The Holy Fathers are of supreme authority whenever they all interpret in one and the same manner any text of the Bible, as pertaining to the doctrine of faith or morals; for their unanimity clearly evinces that such interpretation has come down from the Apostles as a matter of Catholic faith.
- ♦ **Purity of Heart:** Only the pure in heart “shall see God.” That is, our spiritual state has a direct bearing on our interpretation of the Scriptures. As St. Athanasius said, “One cannot possibly understand the teaching of the scriptures unless one has a pure mind and is trying to imitate their life.” Because the Scripture is a book inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore moral and spiritual discipline are necessary in order to understand Scripture properly.
- ♦ **The Primary end of Scriptural Hermeneutics is that of the Whole Christian Life, *theosis* (deification/divinization).** That is, our purpose in attempting to understand the Bible must not be merely for academic inquiry but rather must be in order to become fully divinized human beings. We interpret Scripture in order to become by grace what Christ is by nature, to “become god.”

Fifth Stage: From the Enlightenment to the Modern Era

- ♦ **Rationalism and Deism:** The mood of Europe turned toward rationalism. Rationalists such as Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) and John Locke (1632-1704) argued for a moral and rational religion. In the mood of the time it was easy for the Deists to conclude that supernaturalism was not rational at all. They rejected the Reformers and, in turn, erected a rival religion based entirely on natural reason alone. And so, a Deist like Anthony Collins (1676-1729) taught that the prophecies could not possibly be literal prophecies, and that miracles were absurd. The “seeing” culture was now stronger than the “hearing” culture. This led to the period of radical biblical criticism.

- ♦ **Neo-Orthodoxy of Karl Barth (1886-1968)** affirmed that the Living Word of God is able to speak through the text even if the written word was found to be flawed with human weakness. It allowed the Bible to be a means of grace once again. The neo-orthodox theologians felt they had returned to the Reformation. The Reformers, Luther and Calvin, both believed that a historical study of the text helps the reader to avoid subjectivism. Barth, on the other hand, downplayed the historical reading of the text. He said that the Bible was not the Word of God; it merely contained the Word of God.
- ♦ **Demythologization of Bultmann** tried to separate faith from historicity. The existentialist approach of Bultmann argued that our existential experience of the text is our “faith” (death of the author).

The various critical approaches, mainly the diachronic approaches have taken lead during this period. The synchronic approaches also began to take shape during this period.

1. Textual Criticism (sometimes still referred to as “lower criticism”) refers to the examination of the text itself to identify its provenance or to trace its history. It takes as its basis the fact that errors inevitably crept into texts as generations of scribes reproduced each other’s manuscripts. Textual criticism is a rigorously objective discipline using a number of specialized and scientific methodologies.

2. Source Criticism is the search for the original sources which lie behind a given biblical text. It can be traced back to the 17th-century French priest Richard Simon and Julius Wellhausen. An example of source criticism is the study of the synoptic problem and four documentary hypothesis of Pentateuch.

3. Form Criticism breaks the Bible down into sections (*pericopes*, stories) which are analyzed and categorized by genres (prose or verse, letters, laws, court archives, war hymns, poems of lament, etc.). The form critic then theorizes on the pericope’s *Sitz im Leben* (“setting in life”), the setting in which it was composed.

4. Redaction Criticism studies “the collection, arrangement, editing, and modification of sources”, and is frequently used to

reconstruct the community and purposes of the authors of the text. It is based on the comparison of differences between manuscripts and their theological significance.

5. Canonical Criticism is “an examination of the final form of the text as a totality, as well as the process leading to it”. Where previous criticism asked questions about the origins, structure and history of the text, canonical criticism addresses questions of meaning, both for the community (and communities-subsequent communities are regarded as being as important as the original community for which it was produced) which used it, and in the context of the wider canon of which it forms a part.

6. Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible dates back to at least St. Augustine. Rhetorical criticism emphasized the unique and unrepeatable message of the writer or speaker as addressed to his audience, including especially the techniques and devices which went into crafting the biblical narrative as it was heard (or read) by its audience. Rhetorical criticism asks how the text *functions* for its audience, including especially its original audience: to teach, persuade, guide, exhort, reproach, or inspire, and it concentrates especially on identifying and elucidating unique features of the situation, including both the techniques manifest in the text itself and the relevant features of the cultural setting, through which this purpose is pursued.

7. Narrative Criticism is one of a number of modern forms of criticism based in contemporary literary theory and practice. In common with other literary approaches (and in contrast to historical forms of criticism), narrative criticism treats the text as a unit, and focuses on narrative structure and composition, plot development, themes and motifs, characters, and characterisation. Narrative criticism is a complex field, but some central concerns include the reliability of the narrator, the question of authorial intent, and the implications of multiple interpretation - i.e., an awareness that a narrative is capable of more than one interpretation, and thus of the implications of each.

8. Psychological Criticism is a perspective rather than a method. It discusses the psychological dimensions of the authors of the text, the material they wish to communicate to their audience, and the reflections and meditations of the reader.

9. Socio-Scientific Criticism (also known as socio-historical criticism and social-world criticism) is a contemporary form of multidisciplinary criticism drawing on the social sciences, especially anthropology and sociology.

Sixth Stage: Late Modern to Postmodern

- ✓ **Subjective Existentialism:** Many who are influenced by Bultmann will say that they interpret the Bible metaphorically. The problem with this approach is that the reader defines the metaphor, thereby causing them to read their own meaning into the text. This is nothing more than a subjective existentialism, which is not the biblical doctrine of illumination, or hearing the Voice of God in Scripture.
- ✓ **Reader Response Criticism:** In recent decades, a great deal of scholarly attention has been given to the reader's literary, subjective experience of the text. New literary criticism ponders the "world of the text." It derives meaning solely from the literary impressions given by the text itself, devoid of any historical background. Reader response criticism is similar to narrative criticism but enters into the world of the reader as listener to the story of the text.
- ✓ **Subjective and Analytical Approaches:** In postmodern times, two things must happen for us to restore a balanced study of the Bible which includes both subjective and analytical approaches. First, we must find a way to subjectively experience the Voice of God in the Bible without falling into an existential subjectivism. Secondly, we must find a way to analytically study the Bible without resorting to the radical historical criticism of the past. This approach would respect the historical basis of the faith without making biblical authority dependent upon historical criticism.

Seventh Stage: A Future Threats and Hopes

- ❖ **Critical Realism:** Critical realism believes there is an objective reality, even while it acknowledges the limits of our ability to understand that reality. When we apply this approach to the study of a biblical text, critical realism allows us to study the text analytically, but it also reminds us that we will never be able to completely understand the original meaning.
- ❖ **The Authority of the Bible** is not dependent on the caprice of historical criticism. Rather, the sense of authority arises from the

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Story of God's self-revelation told in Scripture in other words, from the biblical meta-narrative. In other words, biblical authority ultimately rests on the person-hood of God.

- ❖ **Importance of Inspiration:** A critical realism approach to studying the Bible, along with a proper understanding of the biblical doctrine of illumination, provide us with a good step toward returning to a healthy balance of studying the Bible analytically and also hearing the Voice of God in the text.
- ❖ **Faith-filled Interpretation:** Pope Benedict XVI has indicated in *Verbum Domini*, the post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the Word of God, that “Christianity... perceives in the words the Word himself, the Logos who displays his mystery through this complexity and the reality of human history”. He encourages a “faith-filled interpretation of Sacred Scripture”. He emphasizes that this manner of interpretation, “practiced from antiquity within the Church’s Tradition...recognizes the historical value of the biblical tradition”. It “seeks to discover the living meaning of the Sacred Scriptures for the lives of believers today while not ignoring the human mediation of the inspired text and its literary genres” (*Verbum Domini* #44).

Chapter 5

The Various Senses of the Bible

Augustine of Dacia (+1282) sums up the hermeneutical principles of the fathers, distinguishing the four sense as: *littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas [quid speras] anagogia*. (The literal sense teaches facts which you have to believe which you have to do and where you are headed). Jerusalem illustrates these principles, which in its literal sense is the historical city, allegorically, the church; morally, the soul; and analogically, the heavenly Jerusalem.

These four senses of the Bible can be classified into two: the literal (historical sense) and spiritual sense of the Bible. This distinction is also found in medieval exegesis as well: *storia, allegoria, tropologia* (moral), and *anagogia*. In the global context of Scripture the interpreter can discern a history, as a series of interventions in the history of salvation, and this history itself conceals the mystery of Christ (the spiritual sense of the fathers). This spiritual sense has three levels: allegorical (symbolic, Christological-the truth revealed, ‘that which you have to believe’), tropological (moral - the way of life

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commended, 'that which you have must do'), and anagogical (eschatological-the final goal to be achieved, 'where you are headed').

According to St. Thomas "all the sense are based on one, namely the literal, from which alone an argument can be drawn, and not from those which are said by way of allegory... Yet nothing is lost to sacred Scripture because of this, because nothing necessary for faith is contained in the spiritual sense, which Scripture does not clearly pass on elsewhere by the literal sense".

In the middle Ages sense literals was understood as the meaning conveyed by the words (literate, verba) of Scripture, as distinct from the spiritual sense (sense spiritualis) contained in the Scripture. In modern literary discussion, 'literal' refers to the sense perceived in reading, as meaning flows from the dialogue between the text and the reader. We use literal sense as 'the sense' which the human author directly intended and which the written words conveyed.

Concerning the books which had a long history of editing and redaction of earlier written works (eg., Isaiah-its composition took 200 years, with new sections being added to the original, some of which modified the meaning of the original text), the search for the literal sense includes both the sense of the original before editing and its sense after the editing.

'Author' in this description of the literal sense must be understood rightly. Many of the books are anonymous or pseudonymous; Most of them are the product of complex growth and collective contribution. None of the canonical Gospel writers identified themselves by name.

Despite this, the reference to that author's intention affirms that those who produced the biblical books had a message for the readers of their times. It is important for us to have this message in mind when we read texts and to ask what they now mean for us. What the text now means may well be more abundant, but it should have some relationship to what it meant to the first readers.

The adverb 'directly' when it occurs in the literal sense would distinguish it from those meaning by which the author's words may have been understood later (in the larger context of the Bible or when read in later times) but of which he was unaware.

Written words conveyed:- Priority must be given to the text. The author's intension does not become a sense of the Scripture until it is

effectively conveyed in writing. Jesus did not write a Gospel, but the evangelists did. Most often we do not know the context in which Jesus actually spoke his words. The literal sense of a Gospel passage is the meaning attributed to Jesus words by the individual evangelist, with the result that the same words can have different meanings according to the different contexts in which each evangelist set them.

The literal sense of the Bible is that which has been expressed directly by the inspired human. As the Bible is the fruit of inspiration, what is expressed in the text is also intended by God, the principal author. Efforts are necessary to know the literal sense. The authors of the Bible used forms of literature typical of their times and hence their literal sense is not as obvious as it is in the works of our own time. Therefore one must make realistic efforts to grasp what the authors of Sacred Scripture is trying to communicate. The principal task of the exegete is to analyse the material, making use of all the resources of literary and historical research, with a view of defining the literal sense with the greatest possible accuracy. There is the need to acquire professional knowledge of biblical geography, archaeology, culture and of the way in which the texts were transmitted.

Even though there usually exists only one literal sense, one must still know that the human author can refer to more than one level of reality at the same time, especially in the case of poetry. Biblical inspiration does not exclude this capacity of human psychology and language. For instance: Jn 19:28 ('I thirst'- bodily and spiritual level); Jn 19:30 ('delivered his spirit'- lit. 'Jesus died' and the implicit allusion would be 'He gave the Spirit to the Church'. Giving of the Spirit to the Church is the literal sense in Jn 20:22).

Even when a human utterance appears to have only one meaning, divine inspiration can use the expression in such a way as to create more than one meaning. This is true in the saying of Caiaphas "It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50; see also vv. 51-52). Caiaphas meant that the nation could thereby avoid many troubles on the part of the Romans (political reason), whereas John meant "to gather into one the dispersed children of God" (religious reason). Either way, this passage of John belongs to the literal sense, as is made clear from the context itself.

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In the attempt to find the literal sense one has to take into account the dynamic aspect of many texts. For example, the meaning of ‘royal psalms’ (e.g., Ps 2;72; 101;110;132) should not be limited to the historical circumstance of their being written. When speaking of the king, the psalmist at one and the same time evokes both the kingship as it actually existed and the idealized vision of kingship as God intended it to be. The text carries the reader well beyond the institution of kingship its historical, actual manifestation.

Ps 110:1 “The Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool’” (quoted in Mk 12:35-37). This messianic (prophetic) sentence can be applied to every king of Israel (son of David), but can be applied in a perfect way only to Jesus.

Historical-critical exegesis has too often tended to limit the meaning of texts by tying it too rigidly to precise historical circumstance whereas modern hermeneutics know that human speech gains an altogether fresh status when put into writing. Written text has the capacity to be placed in new circumstances, which will illuminate it in different ways, adding new meaning to the original sense. This is especially operative in the Bible as the word of God. All this does not, however, mean that we can attribute to a biblical text whatever meaning we like, interpreting it in a wholly subjective way. One must reject every interpretation as unauthentic which is alien to the meaning expressed by the human authors in their written text.

Important Auxiliaries to Get to the Literal Sense

a) Knowledge of the history of the biblical era: This history of the people of God must be integrated into the history of the Near East. We cannot divorce God’s action from that of history because God acts only in concrete times and circumstances. This history must also include sociological aspects-not only information on royal courts, international politics and wars – the very structure of the social life of the people involved in the biblical story must be analyzed so as to understand the biblical era in all its ramifications (aspects).

b) Knowledge of biblical languages and literary styles: Some familiarity with the structure and thought pattern of Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic is essential. Knowledge of Hebrew tenses, with their undefined time designations and lack of temporal precision opens the prophecies to the present and to the present fulfillment. For instance,

words such as *hesed* (covenantal kindness mercy) and *aletheia* (truth) receive only a part of their connotation in translation.

Reading the Scripture should involve an understanding of what the original author meant, since his message for his times was certainly part of God's inspired communication. The primary duty of the human author was to be intelligible in his era. What he writes communicates meaning to us today, but he did not envision our circumstances and he did not write for our times. Hence, in the effort to draw a message from his text for our circumstances, we must ask whether we achieve true communication or only an illusion in which we impose on the text what we want to find (*eisegesis*).

In the quest for the literal sense of any writing, it is important to determine the literary form the author was employing. The Bible is a library with all the diversity all the diversity we would expect spanning a period of more than 1100 years. Hence it is necessary to classify the books according to the type of literature they represent-this is what is meant by determining the literary form.

The first question we must ask when we open any book is : "What type of literature do we have before us?" (This method of determining the literary form, in fact, existed even in ancient times-the Jewish divisions as Pentateuch, Prophets, and Sapiential literature testify to this).

In the Bible there are also many varieties of poetry: a) epic poetry-some narratives of Pentateuch and Joshua; b) didactic poetry-Prov, Sir, Wis) Iyric poetry-Pass, Cant.

In the prophetic books we meet prophecy and apocalyptic.

There are also many forms of history: a) factual analysis, seemingly by can eye-witness (the court history of David-2 Sam 11-2 Kgs 2); b) court records (Kgs and Chr); c) romanticized and simplified epic history of the national saga (in Exodus); d) tales of tribal heroes (in Judges); e) tales of great men and woman of ancient times (in the patriarchal accounts of Genesis); f) prehistory. This is seen in the Genesis narratives regarding the origin of humanity and of evil which borrow from the lore of other nations, making them vehicles of monotheistic theology.

Apart from these, there are tales, parables, allegories proverbs, maxims, love stories, etc.

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Once the reader has determined the literary form of any biblical book or passage, that standard applicable to the form helps to clarify the literal sense (that which the author meant). For instance, if Jonah is understood as a parable, the reader would know that the author is not presenting a history of relationship between Israel and Assyria, nor the story of a prophet in the belly of the whale; rather, it is a prophetic book which communicates the profound truth of God's love for the Gentile nations; if Josh 10:13 is part of a victory song, readers will judge it not according to rules of strict history nor give it the same historical credence allotted to the history of David's court.

In the past, for biblical interpretation, the failure to recognize the diversity of literary forms of the biblical books, and the tendency to misinterpret as scientific history pieces of the Bible that are not really historical, or are historical in a more popular sense, created great problems.

The need for determining the type of literature can lead to misconceptions: Some may think that it is dangerous to apply the theory of literary forms to the more sacred sections of the Bible. The fact is these are classified as belonging to one type of literature or another. There is factual history, mythology, fiction, and almost all the intermediary types in the Bible. If the correctly classifies a certain part of the Bible as belonging to a particular type of writing one is simply recognizing the author's intension in writing that section. This should not be seen as destroying the historicity. One need not think that this would weaken or challenge its inspiration. DAS (Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, 1943) says: "God could inspire any type of literature that was not unworthy or deceitful, i.e., 'not contrary to his holiness and truth'.

More than Literal Sense

By 'more than literal sense' we mean the scriptural meaning that goes beyond the literal sense, a sense that is not confined to what the human author directly intended and conveyed in the written words. This 'more than literal sense' is especially pertinent to the Bible. It is because

- Bible is a collection of books by many authors and
- it is the Word of God.

a) The books of individual authors were joined together into a collection called the Bible centuries after they were written. This was a new arrangement, which could have scarcely been foreseen by the original author (Luke thought of his Gospel and Acts as a unified work, but it was divided in the canonical process. There exists no evidence that the author of John with his claim of unique witness would have thought that his work would be placed alongside and on the same level with the other works called Gospels). The juxtaposition of the books provides connections in the Bible that no single author would have made, thus enlarging the meaning originally intended.

b) The Bible is God's word to audiences of all times. This continuing biblical engagement of readers/hearers with the Word of God uncovers meaning beyond those which were envisioned by the human author in his local and limited circumstances. The quest for the dynamic aspect of the word should not deviate from exegesis so that it becomes eisegesis (the imposition of a meaning to a text that is alien to it). Exegesis is the meaning that arises from the text.

Both in pre-Christian Judaism and post-Christian rabbinic circles the quest for a 'more-than-literal-exegesis' was just as common as in Christian circles. In the early Christian writings of the 2nd cent., we find evidence of a very free spiritual exegesis. Exegetes such as Tertullian and Justin searched the OT for proof texts referring to Christ, and they interpreted these passages in a way that went far beyond the literal sense. Origen did not disregard the literal sense but was interested in a sense that could make Christians see the OT as their book. His allegorical interpretation was based on the thought that the OT was Christological in many passages.

Spiritual (Christological) Sense

Spiritual sense, as understood by Christian faith, is the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery and of the new life which flows from it. The paschal event has established a radically new historical context, which sheds fresh light upon the ancient texts and causes them to undergo a change in meaning. The spiritual (Christological) sense does not change the literal sense, but rather makes it explicit or fulfils it. We cannot exclude from the Bible, especially from the OT, this Christological sense, the possibility of a higher fulfillment.

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Gen 3,15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel”. This is the first promise of a redeemer (and of his mother).

2 Sam 7, 12-13: “... I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

This text must be now taken literally, because Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom 6:9). Exegetes who have a narrow, ‘historical’ view of the literal sense, will judge this as an interpretation alien to the original. Those who are open to the ‘dynamic’ aspect of a text, instead will recognize here a profound element of continuity as well as an element of discontinuity: Christ rules for ever, but not on the earthly throne of David. It is therefore quite acceptable to reread the Bible in the light of the Christ Event. See also Is 52:13-53:12; cf. suffering servant Acts 8.32.

While there is a distinction between the two sense, the spiritual sense cannot be stripped of its connection to the literal sense; the latter remains the indispensable foundation. Otherwise one could not speak of the fulfillment of the Scripture. In order for fulfillment to be accomplished, a relationship of continuity and conformity is essential. It is also necessary that there be a transition to a higher level of reality. The paschal lamb of Ex 12:46,(Ps 34:20) and Jn 19:36 are examples of such a transition.

Spiritual sense is not to be confused with subjective interpretation stemming from imagination or intellectual speculation. The spiritual sense results from setting a text in relation to real facts which are not alien to it: e.g., the paschal mystery, in all its inexhaustible richness, which constitutes the summit of the divine intervention in the history of Israel, to the benefit of all mankind.

Typological Sense

It is “the deeper meaning of the things written about in the Bible when they are seen to have foreshadowed future things in God’s work of salvation”. The typological sense usually belongs not to the

Scripture as such, but to the realities (persons, places and events) expressed by the Scripture. The reality which foreshadows is called 'type' and the future reality that is foreshadowed is called 'antitype'. Type and antitype are on two levels of time and only when the antitype appears does the typological sense become apparent. Type is imperfect and the foreshadowing is related to God's plan of salvation.

- Adam (type) as the figure of Christ (cf. Rom 5:14); the flood (type) as the figure of baptism (1 Pet 3:20-21)

Actually the connection involved in typology is based on the way in which Scripture describes the ancient reality (cf. the voice of Abel: Gen 4:10; Heb 11:4; 12:24) and not simply on the reality itself. Consequently, in such a case one can speak of a meaning which is truly Scriptural.

1 Cor 15:45 (Jesus as the new Adam); Rev 12:1-5 (Mary as the new Eve); Ex 16:4, 15; Ps 78:24 (manna and Eucharist Jn 6:31-32; Rev 2:17). The manna, however, was a miraculous nourishment, but not bread coming down from heaven as is the Eucharist.

- Num 21:9 (bronze serpent on the pole) and the lifted son of man (Jn 3:14). Here one must, however, know that it was not the bronze serpent on the pole that gave salvation, but a vision (act) of faith.

Fuller Sense

Sense plenior is the deeper meaning of the text, intended by God, but not clearly expressed (intended- R.E. Brown) by the human author. This is known as one studies a text in the light of other biblical passages which utilize it or in its relationship to the internal development of revelation: Unlike the typical sense, but like the literal sense, *sensus plenior* is primarily concerned with the words of scripture rather than with 'things'. This concept was first employed by Andre's Fernandes in 1925. It is used to refer to the idea of the fulfillment of the OT in the NT.

The catholic understanding of biblical inspiration distinguishes between God as primary author and the inspired human author as the secondary author. Such an understanding helps one to see how God could have moved a human writer to formulate an idea, the *sensus plenior* which would only become apparent in the light of subsequent use of such a formulation and of which the original human author would have had no inkling.

Sensus Plenior is Then a Question of:

a) The meaning a subsequent biblical author attributes to an earlier biblical text, using it in a context which confers upon it a new literal sense.

Eg: Mt 1:22-23 “All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us”. The prophecy quoted here is Is 7:14. In the Issaianic text the prophet does not in fact speak of a ‘virgin’. The Hebrew word used is *alemah* (=young/ adolescent woman, a girl just married), which was the wife of Achaz, who bore Hezekiah. To speak of a virgin Hebrew has another word at its disposal, *I betulah* (Is 23:4, 12; 37:22). The Hebrew original *alemah* was translated in LXX with *parthenos* which really means ‘virgin’. By using the LXX translation, the evangelist gives a fuller prophetic sense to Is 7:14.

b) The meaning that an authentic doctrinal tradition or a conciliar definition gives to a biblical text.

Eg: Rom 5:12-21: the definition of the doctrine of original sin by Trent provided the fuller sense of Paul’s teaching about the consequences of the sin of Adam for humanity.

When the control by an explicit biblical text or by an authentic doctrinal tradition is lacking, recourse to a claimed fuller sense could lead to subjective interpretation deprived of any validity. In effect, *sensus plenior* is only a modern way of expressing a certain kind of spiritual sense in given instance where the spiritual sense is distinct from the literal sense. It has its foundation in the fact that the Holy Spirit, the principal author of the Bible, can guide human authors in the choice of language so that it will.

Express a truth, the fullest depth of which the authors themselves did not perceive. This deeper truth will be revealed in the course of time: a) through further divine interventions which clarify the meaning of the texts-Jn 19:37 clarifies Zec 12:10; Rev 1:7; b) through the insertion of the texts into the canon of the Scripture. In these cases a new contexts is created, which brings out fresh possibilities of meaning that had lain hidden in the original context.

Philosophical and Theological Hermeneutics

The Reformation led by Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli (16th c.) considered Scripture as the sole foundation of faith (*sola scriptura*). This was in line with the earlier thinking of John Wyclif (14th c.). The reformers differed from the overwhelming majority of ancient exegesis in their insistence on the right of SS, as literally interpreted, to stand alone. Catholic exegesis relied strongly on the authority of the fathers and the authority of the tradition of the church in interpretation.

Until the 17th century the difference in hermeneutics thoughts were limited to : a) preference for the literal and the allegorical sense; b) acceptance or the non-acceptance of the ecclesial tradition; and c) the ways of interpreting inspiration. But both the Catholics and protestants accepted: a) the existence of a transcendent creator God; b) the datum of revelation; c) the possibility and the fact of miracles; d) SS as a sacred and inspired book to be interpreted according to particular canons/rules; e) a dichotomy between natural and supernatural.

In the 17th and 18th centuries we find a radical change in these: In the philosophical field this was due to

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rationalism, empiricism, and the enlightenment movement; in the literary field, the discovery of new manuscripts and critical methods; in the scientific field, the progress of positive sciences called into question the old beliefs; in the historical field, the new methods of research and new discoveries made the difference. At this time we find the word 'hermeneutic' appearing more frequently as a general science even though the theories of interpretation were used from very ancient times. Now Hermeneutics became a general science of understanding as well as a way of explaining a text.

In the biblical field outside the catholic world, this ideological revolution shook centuries-old axioms and it also opened the doors to a deeper scientific study of the Bible. It was at this period that Scripture began to be considered as a historical document and exegetes became interested in understanding the mind of the authors and their historical context. It is at this time that we find commentators searching for the *ipsissima verba* of the biblical writers and for the historical Jesus.

The post-reformation interpretation of the Bible gave rise to 'Protestant Liberalism' resulting in many negative interpretations of the Bible known as "the accommodation theory", 'the naturalist interpretation' the theory of dialectical development of dogma, and 'the mythical theory'. J.S Semler (1725-'91) in his accommodation theory claimed that Scripture teachings regarding miracles, vicarious and expiatory sacrifice, the resurrection, eternal judgment, and the existence of angels and demons are to be regarded as accommodation of the superstitious notions, prejudices and ignorance of the times. The supernatural was set aside and the doctrine of divine inspiration of the Scriptures was rejected. This questioned the very nature of SS.

H.E.G Paulus, a rationalist contemporary of Schleiermacher, proposed the Naturalistic Interpretation. He rejected all supernatural activities in human affairs and explained the miracles of Jesus either as acts of kindness or exhibitions of medical skill, or illustrations of personal sagacity and tact, recorded in a manner peculiar to the age and opinions of the different writers. F.C.Baur (1792-1860) under the influence of Hegel's theory of history believed in the dialectical development of dogma. He argued that the history of early Christianity was to be interpreted in the light of thesis (Judaizers=Jewish) antithesis (Paul and his followers=Gentiles), and the synthesis (the gospels and epistles were a synthesis of both these elements). Baur's disciple,

D.F. Strauss (1808-1874), proposed the mythical theory. He considered the Christ of the Gospel's as the mythical creation of the early church. At present no serious scholar will subscribe to any these negative interpretations.

Biblical interpretation needs appropriate intellectual tools in order to work with the biblical text. It is the competence of philosophy to provide concepts and tools to guide biblical interpretation. Through the works of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Barth, Bultmann, Gadamer, Ricoeur, etc. 'hermeneutics' became a systematic discipline in the contemporary philosophy and theology. In this respect we have different ways of understanding Hermeneutics. a) as a theory of biblical exegesis-whether it is ancient, medieval or modern. b) as a general method, but exclusively linguistic, according to the theories of the new philological sciences of the 18th cent; c) as the 'science' of every type of linguistic comprehension as proposed by Schleiermacher; d) as the methodical foundation of the Geisteswissenschaften (sciences of the spirit) understood by W. Dilthey; e) as the phenomenology of existence and existential comprehension ('philosophy' of the interpretation) according to Martin Heidegger, Rudolf Bultmann, and Hans-Georg Gadamer; f) as 'theological exegesis' as proposed by Karl Barth; and g) as a system of interpretation concerning the meaning of myths and symbols as proposed by Paul Ricoeur.

Schleiermacher (1768-1834)

Schleiermacher is called 'the father of modern hermeneutics' for the widened the scope of hermeneutics from its being a set of principles governing interpretation of Bible and classical philology into a rigorous science of interpretation. He made a sharp distinction between principles of general hermeneutics and the concerns of a particular hermeneutics, such as biblical hermeneutics and hermeneutics. In this context he understood general hermeneutics, such as biblical hermeneutics. In this context he understood general hermeneutics as the art of understanding any written text and biblical hermeneutics should not contradict these principles of general hermenutics.

There are two major influences on Scheiermacher's hermeneutics: a) Kant, who gave primacy to epistemology over ontology and positivism; b) Romanticism, which holds that the unconscious human mind is the source of creating ideas and meaning. Under these two

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influences, Schleiermacher was searching for a living relation between the process of the creation of ideas (Romantic) and of universally valid rules of understanding (Kantian).

Schleiermacher's hermeneutics stressed the two principles involved in the act of understanding the text and the author: a) Grammatical principles: The knowledge of grammar helps the reader to reach only the exteriority of the written text. The meaning of the text can be understood only from the author's idea, context, and the first audience to whom the text is originally addressed. Similarly the part and the whole of an author's text can be understood only in relationship to each other; b) Technical/Psychological principle: According to this principle, through an act of sympathetic intuitive comprehension, a divinatory comprehension, the interpreter should try to enter into the author's mind, so as to gain an immediate grasp of the author as an individual in order to understand him. Understanding, for Schleiermacher, is primarily understanding the author.

Kant saw the mind impersonal whereas under the influence of Romantic philosophy Schleiermacher saw the mind as the creative unconscious at work in gifted individuals. Thus his Kantian background gave a critical thrust to his hermeneutics and the romantic philosophy gave a psychological approach. According to Schleiermacher, the task of hermeneutics is to avoid misunderstanding. Misunderstanding, which is caused by the individuality of the writer and the reader, necessitates a universal or a general hermeneutical theory (theory of understanding). He sought to work out a general hermeneutics as the foundation for all kind of text interpretations. He considered hermeneutics as the art of comprehending a text.

Wihelm Dilthey (1833-1911)

W. Dilthey was a philosopher of history. His hermeneutical theories were influenced by his teacher Schleiermacher and the theories of Kant and Hegel. Kant tried to develop a rigorous theory of the knowing process. But Hegel considered Kant's philosophy too abstract. Dilthey tried to complement Kant's critical philosophy with Hegel's historical interest.

Dilthey distinguishes between *Naturwissenschaften* (natural science) and *Geisteswissenschaften* (science of the Spirit/human science). He sought to make hermeneutics the foundational discipline

of all human science. According to Dilthey, understanding life is different from knowing objects through explanations in natural sciences. He sought to make hermeneutics the foundational discipline of all human science. Man expresses his life through signs, symbols, and works. History is a record of such objectifications. It is only through these objectifications of life that one can understand life. Hence, for Dilthey, understanding is historical and the task of hermeneutics is to understand life from these expressions of life as recorded in history.

According to Dilthey understanding has to do not only with linguistic communication, but also with historical consciousness. Understanding require a conscious effort to overcome historical distance. The interpreter must transport himself out of the present time frame to that of the past. Understanding is conceived as *Nacherleben* (re-experience) of the original experience (*Erlebnis*). *Nacherleben* is not identical with the original; it is co-determined by the interpreter's own historical horizon.

For Schleiermacher the focus is the individual and the problems related to interpersonal communication. Dilthey goes further and introduce the epistemological perspective and includes history and tradition as part of his reflection in an effort to explore the hermeneutical dimensions of historical consciousness. Both men sought to underline that the interpreter had to rise above his own historical context or situation and place himself in the perspective of the author. For them understanding is the understanding of the author from his text. They conceived hermeneutics primarily as a technique, a methodological and epistemological enterprise.

Karl Barth (1886-1968)

Being a pastor, Barth's hermeneutical problem was how to proclaim the Word of God so that it would become alive and meaningful for his time. His concept of 'theological exegesis' tries to bridge the division between scientific and practical exegesis and to regain the unity of biblical interpretation. From the perspective of incarnation Barth understands the Bible as the unity of the word of God and man. Hence historical exegesis is unavoidable, but it should serve the better understanding of the real subject matter of the text, Jesus Christ. Barth maintains that a completely objective exegesis is impossible and that real understanding requires the exegete's personal input. For him the

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guiding principles of biblical interpretation are obedience to the word of God and subordination of human concepts to Divine Revelation.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976)

Bultmann is influenced by Heidegger and hence one can find in him an existential interpretation of the SS. His concern is to unite the question of human existence found in the SS and the questions of human existence found in the situation of the modern interpreter. In interpretation what is important is its content. For him, God's word is hidden in the SS just as God's action is hidden in the universe. So the task of hermeneutic is to bring out the hidden word of God from the SS.

Bultmann agrees with Barth that an exegesis without presupposition is an illusion. He considers the biblical text as the result of an existential encounter between God and man, and the subsequent interpretation is aimed at making a similar encounter possible in the present. Bultmann's whole hermeneutical programme is motivated by the need to communicate the kerygma, the existential message of the NT, to a modern audience. The written text represents only an incomplete rendering of the kerygma because the existential encounter inherent in the kerygma cannot be objectified in any full sense of the word. For Bultmann this opens the possibility to apply the full range of historical-critical operations to the text without endangering its essential kerygma. The latter rests on the text are those in which the very existence of the reader is put on the line. Only in this way can the self-understanding (Selbstverständnis) of the reader be challenged.

Bultmann's hermeneutical method is called demythologizing according to which the NT language is mythological. But the kerygma, the basic message of the NT, is important. This message can be retrieved from the mythological language of the text by the process called demythologizing. For many scholars, demythologizing is an impossibility.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)

Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) had great impact on the hermeneutical thinkers that followed him; namely, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur and others. Husserl tried to free philosophical thinking from the imposition of all kinds of system, speculation and dogmatism and propagated a return in philosophy to the things

themselves. In his philosophy, he inquires how knowledge is acquired by paying attention to the essence of a thing that comes to mind-he called it phenomenon - that one comes to know things. His attempt was to provide a foundational theory for all science, whether empirical or scientific. His attention to consciousness, for the study of the formation of knowledge, influenced later hermeneutical thinkers.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

In Martin Heidegger we see a shift from hermeneutics as epistemology (how a subject can know an object) to hermeneutics of being (the very nature of being itself). The question is not 'how do we understand?' but the mode of his being (Dasein) which exists only by comprehending (knowing). For Heidegger, knowing is a constitutive element of human existence itself, an existential element, so that to be a human being signifies to know. To exist as a man is to live knowing. Man is essentially a 'being-in-the-word', existing in particular culture, history, community, and cosmos. Understanding is closely bound up with Dasein's possibilities of existence. Thus, understanding does not involve leaving one's historical context.

According to Heidegger, there are two stages in our process of understanding: a) pre-understanding or presupposition which is the initial pre-understanding or pre-supposition is not a prejudice for Heidegger; rather, it is the very structure that makes understanding possible. Every interpretation which contributes to comprehension must have pre-comprehended that which it interprets. Interpretation is a process. The pre-understanding is challenged when new possibilities for existence are exposed through the event of understanding which leads to modification or revision of the interpreter's self-understanding. This modified understanding itself can become the new pre-understanding in the next phase of the process.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-1986)

Gadamer stresses the historical distance between the text and its interpreter. His hermeneutical circle is: 'I believe in order to understand. I understand in order to believe' (credo ut intellegam, intelligo ut credam) and 'from faith to the text, and from the text to faith'.

A disciple of Heidegger, Gadamer thinks that man is not only projected to the future possibility (as maintained by Heidegger), he is

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also born of a past. He not only goes towards... but also comes from... Due to his origin the pre-comprehension is nourished by a tradition. Every comprehension presupposes a subject and every subject a historical context. Through man's participation in history he is related to tradition. He cannot therefore overcome tradition altogether in his life. Hence valid tradition and legitimate authority have a special value for Gadamer. He is of the opinion that tradition and authority are not against reason.

Hermeneutics cannot be only a question of method striving for objectively secured knowledge. It must open up a dialogical process through which possibilities for existence are acknowledged. A dialogue unfolds between the present and the past, between text and interpreter, each with its own horizon. The goal of interpretation is the fusion of the horizons of the text and that of the interpreter (reader), and thus it is a participation in the stream of history. Further, the dialogue is between the interpreter and the text and not with the author. The text is much more than the author, for the text may have accumulated more meaning in the successive interpretations in its history than that which might have explicitly been intended by the author. Therefore Gadamer speaks of the autonomy of the text from the author.

According to Gadamer, comprehension is a lively insertion in a process of historical transmission, in which the past and the present continually come together. Time, which separates the past from the present, is not an abyss that has to be overcome or climbed over because it separates and distance; instead it has to be seen as the basic carrier, in which the present has its roots with the continuity of transmission of the tradition.

Language effects the synthesis of the horizon of the past (of the text and of the tradition that carries it) and the horizon of the present (that of the interpreter and of his pre-comprehension). Language is related to dialogue and consequently of the dialectic of question and answer. The text speaks to us, answers our questions as well as puts questions to us. In Gadamer there is a shift from understanding 'being' to understanding 'language'.

For Gadamer, understanding is complete only by its application or appropriation, making one's own what one knows. In biblical terms, the encounter with the text can and should lead to metanoia, a change of

mentality, a new and better knowledge of oneself and a new communion of experience with Him and with that which is behind the text.

Paul Ricoeur (1913)

According to Ricoeur, a believing contemporary French philosopher of Protestant faith, man expresses himself through signs and symbols, and the creation of text is an important means of this expression. In his view, once a discourse has been written down and takes the form of a book there takes place distancing of two types: a) first, between the text and the author. Once written, the text takes on an autonomy of its own, it de-contextualizes with respect to the author and his ambient; b) then, between the text and the successive readers who have to respect the world of the text in its otherness. So the text can be understood only through interpretation.

For Paul Ricoeur hermeneutics is a de-condification or discovery of the meaning hidden in an apparent sense. The act of reading consists in connecting the world of the text and that of the reader, establishing a new contextualization (which Gadamer would call a fusion of horizons). Hermeneutics consists not so much in knowing what is behind the text, rather, what is in front of it..

Human existence, in the movement of auto realization, objectifies itself in signs, works, representations and institutions- in culture. Therefore to think means to decipher these signs and understand the human reality in them. The simplest and the most profound form of this objectifying is the symbol which gives origin to myth. At this elementary level, language assumes a symbolic dimension. Ricoeur says that le symbole donne a penser, 'the symbol promotes thought'. It gives the richness of sense deposited in it. The direct, primary and literal sense indicates an indirect, secondary and figurative sense which cannot be had except through the first. Every symbol has a face turned to the past, towards its own origin, and another one turned to the future of the subject, towards the possibilities which awaits it.

In this the demythologization or demystification has its role but not in the sense of simply recognizing the myth to renounce it (Bultmann), but to recognize it as myth in order to liberate the symbolic kernel. In the context of faith this demystification is seen in the service of faith. It uncovers all that in faith has not still arrived at maturation and which remains on the level of pseudo-religious affectivity.

Chapter 7

DEI VERBUM - Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation

At the heart of our Christian faith is the conviction that God has revealed himself to human beings, in the creation itself, especially in the humanity of Jesus, and in the biblical testimony of sages, poets, historians and prophets and apostolic witnesses. This document is the most recent formal expression of the Christian community's understanding of this revelation.

Catechism of the Catholic Church does a great job of summarizing the teaching of Dei Verbum within its account of the long tradition of the Church, especially in Part I, The Profession of the Faith. It also integrates the teaching of Dei Verbum throughout the whole of the Catechism, citing or paraphrasing DV some 77 times

DV, as important as it is, is a relatively short document, running to only 26 numbered paragraphs. So there is a value in studying this document as a whole. It has its own integrity and power. And it has its own fascinating history of development during the four years of the sessions of Vatican II. Knowing the document as a whole, along with its back story and a half century of

responses and developments, enables one to understand any reference to DV in its original context.

Vorlage of DV

Two councils and three documents have in fact paved for the DV. Regarding prior ecumenical councils, remember that before Vatican II, there were only two councils of the Roman Catholic Church since the Renaissance - the Council of Trent (1546-53) and the First Vatican Council (1869-70). Trent did not take up revelation as a topic but established definitively what counted as Sacred Scripture (the canon, or normative list of 46 books for the Old Testament and 27 books for the New Testament), affirmed God as the ultimate author, gave priority to the Latin Vulgate over the original languages, and unscored the Church as the definitive interpreter of the Bible. Against the Lutheran stress on scripture alone as sufficient, from Trent forward the Roman Catholic stressed tradition to forestall the errors that could arise from private interpretation. This gave rise to the relative neglect of Bible study among the laity, and even many of the clergy, for the next four centuries. Catholics read more about the Bible than the Bible itself.

Vatican I affirmed these teachings. But, as we will see, Vatican II recast, renewed, and developed the theme of revelation calling for a robust return to Scripture in the life of the Church.¹

Three documents contributed conspicuously to the stream of ideas that found their way into *Dei Verbum*:

- *Providentissimus Deus* (Nov. 18, 1893), by Leo XIII, cautiously encouraged Catholic biblical scholars to take advantage of recent developments in the understanding of ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and of the variety of literal forms in the cultural contexts, and also of Palestinian archeology in their translations and interpretations of literature. He also established the Pontifical Biblical Commission to take up special questions regarding the interpretation of Scripture.
- *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (Sept. 30, 1943) by Pope Pius XII, encouraged even more strongly the use of all available cultural

¹ Ronald D. Witherup, *The Word of God at Vatican II: Exploring Dei Verbum* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

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and linguistic tools to illuminate and interpret the word of God precisely as words of human beings in their specific times and places.

- **Sancta Mater Ecclesia:** An instruction on the Truth of the Gospels. (April 21, 1964; i.e. about a year and a half before the final session of Vatican II). In other words, towards the end of the process of writing the text of *Dei Verbum*, the Pontifical Biblical Commission issued an important document on the history and tradition within the gospels. This document teaches that the four gospels each contain three different levels of tradition: (1) the oral teaching of Jesus in his public ministry, (2) the post-Easter preaching of the apostles recounting the deeds and words of Jesus, and (3) the written testimony of the four evangelists, who collected, organized, edited, and synthesized these oral and written traditions. This teaching is taken up into paragraph 12 of *Dei Verbum*.

Concerning the Sacred Scriptures, the most recent document with the highest level of authority in the Catholic Church is called the “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” often referred to by its Latin title, *Dei Verbum* (DV), which was officially promulgated on November 18, 1965, by the bishops meeting at the Second Vatican Council. A more recent publication summarizing the Church’s official teachings is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, 1994). Not only does the *Catechism* clearly present the same teachings as *Dei Verbum*, but the structure of this CCC chapter closely parallels the structure of DV:

1. Article 1 of this portion of the CCC (§§51-73) expands upon the teachings of chapter 1 of DV.

2. Article 2 of the CCC (§§74-100) further develops the material presented in chapter 2 of DV.

3. Article 3 of the CCC (§§101-141) summarizes the main points of chapters 3-6 of DV.

Revelation: Official Catholic teachings about the Bible do not deal immediately with the written scriptures, but begin from a much broader perspective, first presenting the Church’s teachings about “Revelation.” In Catholic understanding, divine revelation is much *more* than just the Bible; it is also *more* than God revealing verbal messages to humanity. Rather, it is the entire process by which God

reveals or expresses Himself in our world, what we might call “God’s self-revelation.” Moreover, this process of divine revelation can be seen in four main historical stages:

1. God’s self-revelation in creation, in everything that exists in the universe, from inanimate material, to plants and animals, in what we today call “nature.”

2. God’s self-revelation in and to the human race, who are “created in God’s image and likeness” (see Gen 1:26-27), so we are endowed with reason, which gives us the ability to know God.

3. God’s special revelation to the people of Israel, the “chosen people,” giving them more direct knowledge about God and the world, working in and through their history, sending them messages that were passed down orally and eventually written down in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament).

4. God’s self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, “the Word made flesh” (see John 1:14), “sent from the Father” (cf. John 5:17-37; 14:6-28), who through his words and actions reveals even more clearly everything we need to know about God and our world, about life and love, about forgiveness and salvation.

Tradition: After briefly presenting this broader concept of “Revelation,” but still before addressing the written scriptures, Catholic teachings explain “The Transmission of Divine Revelation,” that is, the process by which God’s revelation is “transmitted” or “handed down” or “passed on” (Latin *traditio*) through the ages. Again, this is a complex process involving several different stages or steps, which one must carefully distinguish from one another. The following stages apply both in the OT era and in the NT era:

1. Historical Events: the actions of the patriarchs, prophets, kings, and all the people of Israel (in the OT era), or the actions of Jesus, his own disciples and apostles (in the NT era).

2. Oral Traditions: the stories about what happened, and the teachings of various people, as passed down from one generation to the next, often by anonymous people.

3. Written Documents: the various books of Moses, the prophets, and teachers of Israel (in the OT); and the recorded Gospels, letters, and other writings of early Christian leaders (in the NT).

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4. Canonization and Interpretation: the “transmission” of God’s revelation did not end with the writing of the individual books of the Bible, but continues in the activity of the Church, first in collecting and “canonizing” the collections of scriptures we now call the Old and New Testaments, as well as in the ongoing teaching, interpretation, and application of God’s revelation in the lives of individuals and communities throughout the centuries.

Scripture: Only after understanding the Catholic Christian teachings about Revelation and Tradition can we also come to a proper understanding of the Church’s teachings about the Bible, the Sacred Scriptures. Only now can we properly see the intertwined relationships between Revelation, Tradition, and Scripture:

1. Contrary to the polemical Reformation-era debates (and popular misunderstandings still today!), “Scripture” and “Tradition” are *not opposed* to each other; they are *not* two separate entities. Rather, “Scripture” (the written Bible) is *part* of the larger reality called “Tradition” (the transmission of divine truth), which is itself part of the larger process called “Revelation” (or better, “God’s self-revelation”). Expressed with mathematical symbols, one might say Revelation > Tradition > Scripture.

2. Although the Bible is obviously a very old and crucial part of the Church’s Tradition, handing on God’s Revelation, it is *not the only part*. Much of God’s self-revelation has been and continues to be handed on to humanity through other aspects of the Church’s Tradition (esp. the liturgy), and even more broadly in various ways. Put differently, although the Scriptures contain Revelation, not all of God’s self-revelation is recorded in the Bible (since God has revealed and continues to reveal Himself in nature, in people, and in many other ways).

3. However, since the Bible contains the indispensable “core” of God’s Revelation, so to speak, Christians believe that *no other revelations* would ever change or contradict what God teaches us in and through the Old and New Testaments. Moreover, as the core of Revelation, the Bible contains all the truths necessary for our redemption and salvation, so that we neither seek nor need any other revelation to supplement or complete God’s revelation as found in the Scriptures.

4. It is also crucial to understand that the Word of God, in Catholic understanding, is not primarily the Bible (the written text), but is Jesus Christ (the incarnate Word). The most important part of Christian faith is not the Bible, but Jesus himself. Jesus came before the Bible (before the NT books were written, and before the complete scriptures were canonized).

5. Moreover, the Church also came before the Bible! That is, not only did the oral preaching of the apostles precede the writing of the NT books (by several decades), but it was the early Church that determined the Canon of the Bible (not until several centuries after Jesus' life).

Chapter 3 of *DV* (and the corresponding paragraphs of *CCC*), also summarize the Catholic Christian teachings about the “divine inspiration” of the Scriptures and their proper interpretation. In contrast to a naïve fundamentalist view of biblical authorship, which sometimes reduces the role of the biblical writers to little more than dictation machines, the Catholic understanding of the “divine inspiration” of the Bible is a good example of the Church’s overall approach to theology:

1. The Bible is *both* the Word of God *and* written in human languages. One can properly say *both* that God is the author of the scriptures *and* that the human writers acted as real authors. They did not merely record the exact words whispered into their ears by the Holy Spirit (as graphically portrayed in much medieval art), but rather made use of their own human abilities in writing their texts (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of course).

2. Because the Bible is written in *human* languages (indeed, *ancient* languages very different from our own!), the proper interpretation of the Scriptures requires not only that we are aware of the limitations of all human language (and the difficulties of translation from one language to another), but also that we pay attention to the various literary forms and modes of expression used by the ancient authors (*see the relevant excerpts highlighted below*).

3. The “inspiration” of the Holy Spirit applies not only to one stage, but to all stages in the long process of the transmission of divine revelation. Not only were Moses, the prophets, Jesus, the apostles, and other biblical characters inspired by the Holy Spirit in their words and actions; not only were the biblical authors inspired by God’s Spirit

as they were busy writing; not only was the Church leaders inspired by the Spirit when they selected which books to include in the biblical canon. Rather, the Holy Spirit was active at all these stages of the process.

4. Finally, the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Christian Church in the correct understanding and proper application of the scriptures for our own lives in community and as individuals. Although this goes beyond the traditional doctrine of the “divine inspiration of sacred scripture,” one can properly say that the Holy Spirit still actively guides the Church in its use of the scriptures in many ways: in liturgical prayer, in small-group discussions, in personal prayer and study, and in many other facets of our individual and communal lives.

***Dei Verbum*: Highlights of Chapter 3**

“Sacred Scripture, Its Divine Inspiration and Interpretation”

Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing *under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit*. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2Tim 3:16; 2Peter 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted. Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation. Therefore “all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind” (2 Tim 3:16-17, Greek text).

However, *since* God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see

clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to “literary forms.” For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.

But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.

In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvelous “condescension” of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, “that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature.” For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.

Chapter 8

The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (1993)

This document was published in 1993 by Pontifical Biblical Commission, celebrating a double anniversary, the first centenary of the Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* of Leo XIII and the 50th anniversary of the *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII which were devoted to biblical studies.

Without claiming any particular method of interpretation as its own, the Church recognizes the Bible as the work of human authors, who employed both their own capacities for expression and the means which their age and social context put at their disposal. Catholic interpretation freely makes use of the scientific methods and approaches which allow a better grasp of the meaning of the texts in their linguistic, literary, socio-cultural, religious and historical contexts.

Catholic interpretation deliberately places itself within the living tradition of the Church, whose first concern is fidelity to the revelation set forth in the Bible. Modern hermeneutics has shown that it is impossible to interpret any text without a pre-understanding of one type or another. Catholic exegetes approach the Bible with the

pre-understanding which holds together modern scientific culture and the religious tradition emanating from Israel and the early Christian community. This interpretation stands in direct continuity with a dynamic pattern of interpretation found within the Bible itself and which continues in the life of the Church. Thus it corresponds to the requirement that there be a living affinity between the interpreter and the text.

Theology, Faith, Scripture, Tradition and Revelation

Today there is a growing awareness that all knowledge is interpretative. This is all the more so in the case of theology, which is an ongoing interpretation of the Christian faith in the light of the present day human existence. There are various factors involved in the process of interpretation of the Christian faith such as Scripture, tradition, magisterium, revelation, inspiration, dogma, the theologians and the church community as a whole. Theology as interpretation is the result of a dynamic interaction of these components.

Scripture is the soul of theology. So it must be given prime importance in theology. If the faith of the church is the starting point of theology, it should be based on the narrative witness of the Scripture, the revelation in the Scripture. Revelation is primarily an event of God's self-communication. Revelation cannot be identified with Scripture or dogma/tradition although there is a temptation to do so. Scripture is a witness to revelation, a testimony in writing, an interpretation of a primary event.

Scripture is the primary witness to revelation. So it has a pre-eminence in theology. This pre-eminence of the Scripture in theology was not always recognized by the church. Instead, tradition, dogma and the authority of the magisterium have often been overemphasized. However, after the second Vatican Council, the unity of Scripture and tradition as a single deposit of the Word of God, the derived character of dogma and the magisterium's role as a functional one of service have all been stressed.

Theology is an ongoing interpretation of Scripture, and dogma is the authoritative interpretation of it at different times. The church interprets Scripture; but at the same time it must allow itself to be interpreted by the Scripture.

Catholic Interpretation of S. Scripture

In the catholic hermeneutics we see three important elements: Scripture, Church and Tradition. After the Reformation and the Council of Trent (1545-1563) the Catholic Church affirmed the role of tradition and the authority of the church over free and unrestricted interpretation of the Scripture. The Catholic hermeneutics received a breathing space in Leo XIII's encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) although it gave only a critical view of the various approaches of that time. It is from the time of Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) that in the Catholic Church a positive encouragement was given to scientific study and interpretation of the Bible.

Vatican II

Vatican Council II (1962-'65) encouraged biblical interpretation. This is evident from the Dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* on "Divine Revelation" (1965). DV 12 speaks of: a) the need for biblical interpretation; b) the use of various methods of interpretation; and c) the principles of wholistic interpretation. The following are the catholic principles of biblical interpretation.

- i) The Bible is the word of God couched in human language and it is to be read and interpreted with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- ii) The Bible is an inspired book having authority for the people of Christian faith.
- iii) The Bible represents a restricted canon of authoritative texts and the interpretation must take into account the unity of the whole Scripture.
- iv) It is given by God to his people for their edification and salvation.
- v) The Spirit who inspired the human author also guides the community of interpreters and believers (the Church) to understand its text.
- vi) Through the Bible, God continues to speak to the readers of every generation.
- vii) The Bible is properly expounded only in relation to the living tradition of the church from which it has evolved.

Chapter 9

Benedict XVI *Verbum Domini:*

The Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, is a response to the 2008 Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, whose theme was *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*. One of the goals of the Synod was to review the implementation of the directives on Scripture found in the Second Vatican Council, especially its Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, and to confront the new challenges of our day. The continuation of this task is one of the main objectives of *Verbum Domini* (no. 3).

Purpose of *Verbum Domini*

Pope Benedict XVI's long awaited Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, was promulgated on the memorial of St. Jerome, September 30, 2010, (released November 11, 2010). It was written as a response to the Synod of Bishops while discussing: "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," October 5-25, 2008. The bishops' intention was to gather, examine more fully, and make known, to the whole People of

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God, the “rich fruits” which were born from the Synod’s study of the word of God in the life and mission of the Church (§1; 121.1). This included highlighting certain “fundamental approaches to a rediscovery of God’s word in the life of the Church as a wellspring of constant renewal.” The aim of the Pope’s Apostolic Exhortation was identical to the Synod’s purpose, in renewing “the Church’s faith in the word of God,” (§14) and to “become increasingly familiar with the sacred Scriptures” (§121.1).

This Apostolic Exhortation is not only rooted in the Church’s tradition on biblical matters, as expressed by the Church Fathers and Doctors, and in the liturgy. But, it particularly builds upon the many interventions of the Church concerning biblical interpretation, over the last century, starting with the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* in 1893.

Following the encyclical letters by Benedict XV, *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920), and Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), a culmination of the Church’s biblical theology was reached in the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (1963). As is suggested by the similarity of the Apostolic Exhortation’s title (*Verbum Domini*) to *Dei Verbum*, it is precisely this milestone text that the Synod and *Verbum Domini* have as their mutual point of reference. *Verbum Domini* is in full continuity with *Dei Verbum*, seeking as its goal, to explain the Vatican Council’s document more fully. By further reflecting on the theme of God’s word, it hopes to “review the implementation of the Council’s directives, and to confront the new challenges which the present time sets before Christian believers” (§3.2).

Structure

The scope of *Verbum Domini* is extensive, as it concerns the fifty-five propositions of the Synod Fathers. The document consists of: (1) *Verbum Domini*; (2) *Verbum in Ecclesia*; and, (3) *Verbum Mundo*. The heart of the Pope’s exhortation lies in *Verbum Domini*, the lengthiest section, which contains an overview of the vital theological principles for the document as a whole. Both *Verbum Domini*-how the Church lives with the word of God; and *Verbum Mundo*-how the Church relates to the world through the word of God; are mostly concerned with applying the principles discussed in *Verbum Domini*. The distinctive themes I am proposing here are mainly presented within

this first section, although, they run like a thread through the entirety of the exhortation.

Part One: *Verbum Dei* (The Word of God)

Part One begins by outlining the significance of the Incarnation, in which the Word became flesh. It then briefly discusses the human response to God's word, before an extended treatment of the topic of the interpretation of Scripture.

Central to the Christian mystery is the Incarnation of the Word, which is the ultimate expression of God's condescension (nos. 11-12). When we speak of "the word," this is always the primary referent. In Christ, the Incarnate Word, God has revealed himself completely (nos. 12, 14).

But the Incarnation also means that God's revelation occurs in space and time. Thus, we have the concept of "inspiration," which implies that revelation contains both a human and divine element (no. 19). When interpreting the Scriptures, we cannot lose sight of the concepts of "inspiration" and "truth" (no. 19).

The fact that God speaks his word to people means that he calls them into a dialogue with himself (no. 23). Mary provides the supreme example of the faith-filled hearing of God's word (no. 27). She is also an example to us of familiarity with that word. "Since Mary is completely imbued with the word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate" (no. 28).

Interpretation of Scripture in the Church

In this section, Pope Benedict stresses that Scripture cannot be properly understood apart from a living faith, nor outside of the family of faith, the Church. Interpretation is not a personal matter apart from the community, for "the Bible was written by the People of God for the People of God, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (no. 30). Because the Bible is the Church's book, it cannot be properly understood apart from that Church.

Regarding methods of exegesis, Benedict draws on *Dei Verbum*, no.12, in order to provide guidelines to be followed in the interpretation of Scripture. The historical-critical method is beneficial, since Christian faith deals with history and "should thus be studied with the methods of serious historical research" (no. 32). But it is inadequate on its

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own, since the true goal of exegetes is reached “only when they have explained the meaning of the biblical text as God’s word for today” (no. 33).

In order to appreciate the divine element in the Bible, three criteria are necessary: [1] the text must be interpreted with attention to the unity of the whole of Scripture (also known as “canonical exegesis”); [2] the Tradition of the Church must be taken into account; and [3] the analogy of faith must be respected (no. 35). Although many Catholic exegetes are competent in the historical-critical method, more attention needs to be paid to the *theological* dimension of biblical texts, in accordance with these three elements.

The danger today is “a dualistic approach to Sacred Scripture” that separates the human from the divine element. Unfortunately, this “occurs even at the highest academic levels” (no. 35). This “dualism” results in the meaning of the text being relegated to the past and having no meaning for us today. This absence of faith often gives way to a “secularized hermeneutic” which tends to reject any miraculous or divine elements in Scripture and even to de-historicize events such as the Lord’s Resurrection (no. 35). Such a flawed methodology can cause great harm to the clarity of homilies and to the formation of seminarians (no. 35).

The Bible’s unity is grounded in the fact that all the Scriptures ultimately point to Christ, the Word (nos. 38-39). This means that the Old Testament remains valid for Christians, even if it has been fulfilled (no. 40). The close relationship between the Old and New Testaments must be brought out in both pastoral and academic settings (no. 41).

A “hermeneutic of faith” must resist both faithless reductionism and fundamentalism. In order to foster such a hermeneutic, Episcopal Conferences are encouraged to help pastors, exegetes, and theologians to work more closely together (no. 45).

With respect to ecumenism, Pope Benedict calls for “an increase in ecumenical study, discussion and celebrations of the word of God,” provided these celebrations of the word do not appear as alternatives to the Mass (no. 46). The creation of common ecumenical translations also remains important (no. 46).

The lives of the Saints, who allowed their lives to be shaped by the word of God, provide the most profound interpretation of Scripture.

“Every saint is like a ray of light streaming forth from the word of God” (no. 48). Their holiness is an interpretation “which cannot be overlooked” (no. 49).

Part Two: *Verbum in Ecclesia* (The Word in the Church)

Part Two considers the place of the word of God in the Church, particularly in the liturgy and in the sacraments. The liturgy is not only the privileged setting in which we hear the word of God, but it is also the goal to which a faith-filled understanding of Scripture must always refer (no. 52). Unfortunately, the close relationship between word and sacrament is not always understood by the faithful, and so it is the task of priests and deacons to explain this unity when they administer the sacraments (no. 53).

Given the importance of the Mass readings, which are proclaimed by a reader, more training should be provided for those who carry out this task in the liturgy. This training should be in the areas of biblical formation, liturgical formation, and technical preparation (no. 58). Because of the importance of the word of God in the sacred liturgy, the quality of homilies needs to be improved... It should lead to an understanding of the mystery being celebrated, serve as a summons to mission, and prepare the assembly for the profession of faith, the universal prayer and the Eucharistic liturgy... Generic and abstract homilies which obscure the directness of God’s word should be avoided, as well as useless digressions which risk drawing greater attention to the preacher than to the heart of the Gospel message. The faithful should be able to perceive clearly that the preacher has a compelling desire to present Christ, who must stand at the centre of every homily (no. 59).

To this end, resources and publications should be developed to help the ministers carry out this task (no. 60).

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the penitent should begin his or her confession by reading or listening to a biblical exhortation, and should use an act of contrition “based on the words of Scripture” (no. 61). Communal celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick are urged in parishes and hospitals (no. 61).

The Liturgy of the Hours has an important place in the Church, and must be prayed daily by Bishops, priests, deacons, and seminarians (no. 62). The recital of Morning and Evening Prayer is to be

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encouraged among the lay faithful in parishes and religious communities (no. 62). In order to aid parishes that lack weekly access to a priest, Pope Benedict asks the competent authorities to develop ritual directories that provide new Sunday celebrations of the word which will not be confused with Sunday Mass (no. 65).

Within the celebration of the Eucharist, the faithful should be educated in the value of silence (no. 66). There could also be a greater solemnity (particularly on major feasts) surrounding the Gospel by making use of the Gospel Book and carrying it in procession. It is also helpful when the Gospel is proclaimed in song, particularly on solemnities (no. 67).

During the Mass, the readings from Scripture are never to be replaced by other texts. This includes the Responsorial Psalm (no. 69). Songs and hymns should be chosen which “are of clear biblical inspiration and which express, through the harmony of music and words, the beauty of God’s word,” particularly traditional music such as Gregorian chant (no. 70). Accommodations should also be made in the liturgy, whenever possible, for the visually and hearing impaired (no. 71).

Pope Benedict urges all the faithful to read the Scriptures and so to encounter Jesus Christ: “I express my heartfelt hope for the flowering of a ‘new season of greater love for Sacred Scripture on the part of every member of the People of God, so that their prayerful and faith-filled reading of the Bible will, with time, deepen their personal relationship with Jesus’” (no. 72). When the faithful do not know the Bible, they are often preyed upon by various sects which promote a distorted reading of Scripture (no. 73).

The knowledge of biblical personages and events is to be encouraged, especially the memorization of those scriptural passages “which are particularly expressive of the Christian mysteries” (no. 74). This scriptural knowledge is to be supplemented by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which is “a sure norm for teaching the faith” (no. 74). Centres of formation should be established where laity and missionaries can receive a stronger formation in the word of God (no. 75).

Within Catholic families, family prayer and reading of the Bible is to be encouraged. Every household should have its own Bible, “to be kept in a worthy place and used for reading and prayer” (no. 85). In

all cases, reading of Scripture should be accompanied by prayer. Here, Benedict cites Saint Augustine: “When you read the Bible, God speaks to you; when you pray, you speak to God” (no. 86).

The practice of *lectio divina* is to be encouraged (no. 87), as is the recitation of the rosary. As regards the latter, the announcement of each mystery should be followed by a short biblical text relevant to that mystery (no. 88).

Part Three: *Verbum Mundo* (The Word to the World)

Part Three deals with the theme of mission and evangelization. The word of God given to us makes us not only *hearers*, but also *heralds* so that we share in Christ’s mission and are empowered by the Holy Spirit (no. 91). The word that we receive is meant for all; it cannot be kept to ourselves. Since it is true, it belongs to everyone (no. 92).

Every area of society needs the light of Christ. “It is not a matter of preaching a word of consolation, but rather a word which disrupts, which calls to conversion and which opens the way to an encounter with the one through whom a new humanity flowers” (no. 93).

This task of proclaiming the word of God belongs to all the baptized. Consciousness of this mission “must be revived in every family, parish, community, association and ecclesial movement” (no. 94). Because many people, particularly in the Western world, are “baptized, but insufficiently evangelized,” there is need for a “new evangelization” (no. 96). This mission must not neglect the poor (no. 99) and the need to strive for justice (no. 100). In this regard, the faithful should receive formation in the Church’s social teaching (no. 100).

Many young people have a “sincere desire to know Jesus.” The Gospel should be proclaimed to them clearly, and they should be taught the Sacred Scriptures so that they can share the Gospel with their peers (no. 104).

In many historically Christian countries there is a large influx of migrants who do not know Christ. This offers a unique opportunity, and “migrants are entitled to hear the *kerygma*, which is to be proposed, not imposed. If they are Christians, they require forms of pastoral care which can enable them to grow in the faith and to become in turn messengers of the Gospel.” (no. 105).

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In Sacred Scripture, the poor have a special place. It is to be emphasized, however, that the poor are also themselves agents of evangelization (no. 107).

Recognizing that the entire cosmos was created through the Word (*cf.* John 1.2), we acknowledge a responsibility toward creation, which is not to be viewed simply as raw material to be exploited. Thus, “accepting the word of God, attested to by Scripture and by the Church’s living Tradition... promotes an authentic ecology which has its deepest roots in the obedience of faith” (no. 108).

Because religious education is so important, “religion teachers should be given careful training” (no. 111). As well, competent offices and groups should promote solid scriptural formation in artists, who are capable of greatly contributing to the beauty of our Churches and our liturgy (no. 112). Further, new means of communication, especially the internet, are to be used in the new evangelization, even if they can never replace personal contact in the real world (no. 113).

Because the word of God is capable of speaking to all human persons, inculturation is possible. This, however, is not to be confused with “superficial adaptation” or a “syncretism which would dilute the uniqueness of the Gospel in an attempt to make it more easily accepted” (no. 114). Rather, true inculturation occurs “when a culture, transformed and regenerated by the Gospel, brings forth from its own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration, and thought” (no. 114).

An essential part of the Church’s proclamation consists in encounter, dialogue, and cooperation with followers of other religious traditions. “This is to take place without forms of syncretism and relativism” (no. 117), but should follow the lines established in the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration *Nostra Aetate* and the subsequent Magisterium. Mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims should be fostered (no. 118).

Biblical Interpretation: Ecclesial Hermeneutic of Faith

Another great theme that *Verbum Domini* addresses is biblical interpretation. In taking up the all-important question of how we can understand the word that God speaks to his children, this third theme manifests how our three themes are so closely related, and how they interact with and affect each other. Pope Benedict is very clear that

what is at root in biblical interpretation is the acceptance of the faith-filled testimonies to the word of God, given by the Church, from the first Apostles to the Synod Fathers. For my portrayal of Jesus is that I trust the Gospels... I believe that this Jesus-the Jesus of the Gospels-is a historically plausible and convincing figure.” The interpreter arrives at an authentic and full understanding of the word of God, wherein God speaks to his children and responds to their questions, through the obedience of faith to the Church’s testimony. This hermeneutic of faith grounded in an “ecclesial spirit” (§47.2) is the foundational criteria *Verbum Domini* posits for guiding biblical interpretation (see §29.1-2).

Benedict claims that an authentic understanding Sacred Scripture essentially involves “faith-filled contact with the word of God” (§104.2). Echoing the words of St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas, the Pope insists: “without faith there is no key to throw open the sacred text” (§29.1). Such contact overcomes the danger of a dualistic split between science and faith, and biblical exegesis and theology, that is caused by a secularized hermeneutic (see §35.1). He is convinced that faith is not opposed to a scientific, reasoned study of history, but rather includes the historical dimension since “the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14) in a particular period and place in history. Unity and right order between historical-critical methods and the hermeneutic of faith can, and must be, achieved for a correct interpretation of God’s word. In this way, the “faith-filled interpretation of sacred Scripture,” taking place within the Church’s tradition, is the true response to a fundamentalist approach. It recognizes the historical value of the biblical tradition, while not ignoring “the human mediation of the inspired text and its literary genres” (§44).

Although each believer is encouraged to read the word of God and appropriate it personally, one must avoid being closed off to the ecclesial community through an individualistic approach. The relationship between the word of God, faith, and the Church is key for Pope Benedict. He repeatedly claims that “a communal reading of Scripture is extremely important, because the living subject in the sacred Scriptures is the People of God, it is the Church... Scripture does not belong to the past, because its subject, the People of God, inspired by God himself, is always the same, and, therefore, the word is always alive in the living subject” (§86.2). author does not speak as

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a private, self-contained subject. He speaks in a living community, that is to say, in a living historical movement not created by him, nor even by the collective, but which is led forward by a greater power that is at work... The Scripture emerged from within the heart of the living subject-the pilgrim People of God-and lives within the same subject... On the one hand, this book-Scripture-is the measure that comes from God, the power directing the people. On the other hand, though, Scriptures lives precisely within this people, even as this people transcends itself in Scripture. Through their self-transcendence (a fruit, at the deepest level, of the incarnate Word) they become the people of *God*. The People of God-the Church-is the living subject of Scripture; it is in the Church that they words of the Bible are always in the present." Therefore, "the sacred text must always be approached in the communion of the Church" (§86.2). That is, "ultimately, it is the living Tradition of the Church which makes us adequately understand sacred Scripture as the word of God" (§17.3).

Since the primary setting for the word of God, in its written form, is the faith life of the Church, who is herself led by the Holy Spirit, then, it can be concluded that "*the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church*" (§29.2; emphasis original). This is a fundamental criterion of biblical hermeneutics since it "is something demanded by the very nature of the Scriptures and the way they gradually came into being" (§29.2).

Benedict is careful to point out that the Church is not an requirement placed upon the word of God from the outside, but rather the word of God arises from the very heart of the Church-it is the very word spoken by the Church herself. Building upon this he writes: "the Bible is the Church's book, and its essential place in the Church's life gives rise to its genuine interpretation" (§29.2). He concludes, "the Bible was written by the People of God for the People of God, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Only in this communion with the People of God can we truly enter as a 'we' into the heart of the truth that God himself wishes to convey to us" (§30.1).

This has significant ramifications for one who seeks an authentic understanding of the word of God, by following the Word in sharing in the life of the Church. The Church is the "home of the word," (§52.1) and as such the Scriptures are intimately related to the Church's spiritual life, in her sacramental and prayer life. A hermeneutic of

faith, working within an “ecclesial spirit,” is needed to carry out the study and interpretation of the word of God. This includes developing scholarly abilities and a deep spiritual life of prayer. The Eucharistic liturgy, which is the source and summit of the Church’s life, “is the privileged setting in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives; he speaks today to his people, who hear and respond” (§52.1). “A faith-filled understanding of sacred Scripture must always refer back to the liturgy” (§52.2).

In addition, interpretation of the word of God includes “listening to those who have truly lived the word of God: namely, the saints” (§48.1). The Pope remarks that “holiness, inspired by the word of God, thus belongs in a way to the prophetic tradition, wherein the word of God sets the prophet’s very life at its service. In this sense, holiness in the Church constitutes an interpretation of Scripture which cannot be overlooked” (§48.3). Saints, and those following Christ with authentic devotion (especially expressed in chastity, poverty, and obedience) become “a living ‘exegesis’ of God’s word” (§83.1). Benedict refers to the writings of Origen who was convinced that “the best way to know God is through love, and that there can be no authentic *scientia Christi* apart from growth in his love” (§86.1).

Pope Benedict sums up this central theme of *Verbum Domini* through the inspiring and beautiful thought of St. Ambrose, “when we take up the sacred Scriptures in faith and read them with the Church, we walk once more with God in the Garden” (§87.3).

Although this Apostolic Exhortation deals with a number of themes, we conclude our summary with Pope Benedict’s impassioned plea at the end of the document:

I remind all Christians that our personal and communal relationship with God depends on our growing familiarity with the word of God. Finally, I turn to every man and woman, including those who have fallen away from the Church, who have left the faith or who have never heard the proclamation of salvation. To everyone the Lord says: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20) (no. 124).

Chapter 10

Exegetical Methods and Approaches

An exegetical method is a group of scientific procedures employed in order to explain texts; this can be: a) The Historical-critical (diachronic) Method; b) New Methods of Literary (Synchronic) Analysis such as Narrative Analysis, Semiotic/Structuralist Analysis, and Rhetorical Analysis.

That the origins and development of a phenomenon contain the key to its understanding is the generic principle behind the various methods of historical criticism. The historical critical method is attentive to the principle behind the various methods of historical criticism. The historical critical method is attentive to the historical development of texts or traditions across the passage of time, that is, summed up in the term diachronic. In other words, it studies the genesis of the text in its vertical movement. Synchronic understanding of the texts has to do with their language, composition, narrative structure and capacity for persuasion.

An exegetical approach means an enquiry proceeding from a particular point of view. This can be: a) an approach based on Tradition; b) an approach that uses

Human Sciences; c) a Contextual Approach; d) a Fundamentalist Interpretation.

Biblical criticism, the study and investigation of biblical writings that seeks to make discerning and discriminating judgments about these writings. The term 'criticism' is derived from the Greek word *kri,nw*, which means 'to judge,' 'to discern,' or to be discriminating in making an evaluation or forming a judgment. It has come to refer to a form of inquiry whose purpose is to make discriminating judgments about literary and artistic productions. Thus, we speak of literary criticism, art criticism, music criticism, or film criticism as disciplines or fields of inquiry whose purpose is to review productions in their respective areas in order to discuss and appraise their significant features and judge their lasting worth.

Historical-Critical (Diachronic) Method

The Biblical is the 'word of God in human language' composed by human authors in all its parts and in all its sources from which it takes shape. The goal of the historical-critical method is to determine, particularly in a diachronic manner, the meaning expressed by the biblical authors and editors. Along with other methods and approaches, the historical-critical method opens up to the modern reader a path to the meaning of the biblical text such as we have it today.

H.Gunkel was concerned with the texture of the different elements of the biblical text and sought to define the genre of each piece (legend, hymn etc.), and its original setting in the life of the community (*Sitz im Leben*) such as its legal setting, liturgical setting etc. *Formgeschichte*, the study of forms, was introduced by Dibelius and Bultmann in the interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels. The latter combined form critical studies with biblical hermeneutics using the existentialist philosophy of M.Heidegger. These efforts have shown that the tradition recorded in the NT had its origin and its basic shape within the Christian community, or early Church, passing from the preaching of Jesus himself to that which proclaimed Jesus as the Christ. *Formgeschichte* was supplemented by *Redaktionsgeschichte*, the critical study of the process of editing, which sought to shed light upon the personal contribution of each evangelist and to uncover the theological tendencies which shaped his editorial work.

i) The Diachronic method is a historical method applied to ancient texts and studies their significance from a historical point of view.

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It seeks above all to shed light on the historical processes which gave rise to the biblical text: complex diachronic processes that often involved a long period of time.

- ii) The Diachronic method is a critical method because in each step it operates with the help of scientific criteria that seek to be as objective as possible, and it tries to make accessible to the modern reader the meaning of biblical texts that are often very difficult to comprehend.

Even though as an analytical method the diachronic method studies the biblical text in the same fashion as it would study any other ancient text and comments upon it as an expression of human discourse, in the area of redaction criticism above all, it does allow the exegete to gain a better grasp of the content of divine revelation. The steps followed in the diachronic method are as follows:

Textual Criticism

Textual Criticism is a specialized and technical discipline aimed at restoring the presumed original form of the text as accurately as possible. We see the diversity of copies of the text, sometimes not agreeing one with the other. On the basis of the oldest and the best mss, as well as papyri, ancient versions, and patristic texts, textual criticism seeks to establish, according to fixed rules, a biblical text as close to the original as possible.

Linguistic and Semantic Analysis

Linguistic analysis is conducted on the philological, morphological, and syntactical levels. All are intended to attain elementary grammatical and linguistic function of each single component and their inter-relationships in the micro-structure of the text. Semantic investigation is concerned with meaning.

In textual meaning one looks at the sense of the words and phrases in themselves, as can be found with the help of a dictionary or lexicon.

In the contextual meaning one is concerned with the sense of words and phrases derived from the context in which they are found, whether in a paragraph or a unit, of a text.

Relational meaning tries to find the sense of the text in the work as a whole or in a corpus of writings originating from the same author.

The first words of the Bible begin: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth”. According to the Hebrew construction of the sentence the placing of an element other than the verb at the beginning of the sentence may suggest emphasis. Thus ‘in the beginning’ (bereshit) may indicate the absolute beginning when there existed absolutely nothing other than God. It is Elohim, the subject of the sentence, who created everything when there was nothing. The Hebrew verb bara used for making/producing is used only with God as subject. It suggests the exceptional nature of this whole divine action (of creation). The heavens and the earth (the totality of the universe) are the direct objects (grammatically as well as in reality) of God’s and are separate from him.

Jesus as logos is found not only in Jn 1:1-18, but also in 1 Jn 1:1-4; Rev 19:13. Flesh, in Jn 1:14 is used to mean ‘incarnation’ and in 6:51-56, to mean ‘Eucharist’

Literary Criticism

Literary criticism determines the beginning and end of textual units, large and small; it seeks to establish the literal coherence of the text. In this stage of critical analysis one is also concerned with the existence of the doublets, irregularities, and irreconcilable differences. This inquiry is important because they can be seen as indicators or clues to the composite nature of certain texts.

Literary criticism shows that, once written, any text assumes a life of its own and may convey meaning beyond the original author’s intention.

Historical Criticism

The detection of what the author meant to say is one aspect of historical criticism. Many times the literal sense is relatively easy to discern; at other times it requires a good knowledge of the ancient languages, grammar, idioms, customs, etc. When the text studied belongs to a historical literary genre or is related to events in history, historical criticism completes literary criticism, so as to determine the historical significance of the text, in the modern sense of this expression.

Historical Criticism and Presuppositions

The Bible is an historical book. It records the history of Israel, the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the history of the early church (Krentz

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1975, p. 1) in the words of humans who were inspired by God (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 76). Because the Bible is an historical work, it is subject to historical investigation and the results of historical research (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 73-74).

The overall purpose of historical-critical methods is to investigate what actually happened in the events described or alluded to (Marshall 1985, p. 126). Krentz (1975, p. 35-36) gives the following goals of historical investigation:

1. Present a body of facts that show what actually happened and why.
2. Illuminate the past, creating a comprehensive picture of a culture's own record of history.
3. Understand the significance of events and interpret them.
4. Understand motives as well as actions.

Marshall (1985, p. 128-130) points out that reading Biblical accounts raises the following historical problems or questions:

1. Discrepancies with parallel Biblical accounts.
2. Discrepancies with non-Biblical material.
3. Historical improbabilities.
4. Supernatural occurrences.
5. Creation/Modification by the early church
6. Literary genre.
7. Insufficient evidence.

These problems and questions may only be resolved by historical study (Marshall 1985, p. 131). Using critical methods it is possible to determine all relevant sources of historical data, the accuracy and credibility of these sources and the development of the material in these sources. Using this information it is possible to determine what is historically probable and form an historical hypothesis which successfully accounts for what the sources say and build a coherent picture of what probably happened (Marshall 1985, p. 127). It is not always possible to arrive at certainty. Complex events are difficult to record in detail and often the sources are missing or incomplete. History

is limited - historians only produce a limited or reduced representation of the past (Krentz 1975, p. 37). There may be several possibilities available each of which is equally probable, so reasoned assessments and conjectures are often called for. However, this results in a problem with presuppositions because they will determine what may or may not be possible and probable (Marshall 1985, p. 127).

This is where historical criticism has been abused. Many practitioners take a “purely scientific” view which excludes any possibility of the supernatural and results in a purely naturalistic interpretation of Biblical events and people. Because of these presuppositions, this view is prevented from saying anything at all about God or the miracles and supernatural works of Jesus Christ (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 74). These scholars hold that all supernatural events described in the Bible are inventions of the early church. Therefore they attempt to get behind this mythology and get at the “real” historical Jesus. Schaeffer (1985, v. 1 p. 52) highlights the problem with this approach: “Naturalistic theology has... begun by accepting the presupposition of the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system. Thus they rejected everything miraculous and supernatural including ... the life of Jesus Christ they still hoped to find an historical Jesus in a rational, objective, scholarly way by separating the supernatural aspects of Jesus’ life from the ‘true history’. But they failed Their search for the historical Jesus was doomed to failure. The supernatural was so intertwined with the rest that if they ripped out all the supernatural, there was no Jesus left!”

Many liberal theologians have used critical methods to show the Bible is not historically accurate. The authors were primarily theologians not historians so the “Jesus of history” is nothing like the Jesus of the Bible. This means that if there is a discrepancy between the Bible and other historical material, it is the Bible that is most probably in error. A Biblical account must be ‘proved’ historically accurate rather than accepted as so (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 82). But this scepticism is unwarranted since the Bible has shown itself time and again to be historically accurate. Historical criticism should pursue without restriction the explanation that best explains the phenomena in question. This includes supernatural explanations (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 89).

Source Criticism

Source Criticism studies the relationship between individual texts in a wider literary contexts and their dependence on source. Here the approach is diachronic which treats language as a historical material. Its most important proponent, Wellhausen, argued that four sources may be found in the Laws of Moses from Genesis to Deuteronomy. This takes the emphasis away from Moses as the author and places new emphasis on the compiler of the sources/documents (this term is used to underline that this is already a written account). Repetitions and double accounts. Narratives of the creation, flood, beginning of the Joseph story, the stories of Abraham (Gen 12-25), Moses and the plagues (Ex 1-11), origins of Passover and crossing of the red sea (Ex 12-15), and God's appearance on Sinai (Ex 19-24) will be seen as indicators for the existence of different sources.

The first source, which mainly used the name Yahweh for God, was called J (Jahwist) and the second using the name Elohim is known as E (Elohists); the source which is particularly interested in the obedience to the covenant is identified as D (Deuteronomist – less evident in Genesis but more in Exodus); the final source, with a repetitive liturgical style and an interest in priestly matters, is called P (Priestly); Wellhausen labeled them as JEDP (the documentary-hypothesis). Pentateuch was a combination of all four sources, developing from as early as the time of Solomon (J) to as late as the time of the restoration of the people after the Babylonian exile (P)

Regarding the Synoptics, source enquiries have demonstrated the existence of at least two sources in their composition, i.e., Q (Quelle = source) and Mark as the basic traditions (the two source theory) of the other two Synoptic Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Explanation of Source Criticism

The author of Luke states that “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.” (Luke 1:1-2, NIV) This implies that in the early church period there were many different sources of material concerning the life of Christ. Luke also states that he “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (v. 3), so it is reasonable to assume that Luke knew about these sources,

read them and used them to compose his own account (v. 3). It is also reasonable to assume that the other gospel writers did the same (Marshall 1985, p. 139). Also, internal evidence such as the similarity/dissimilarity of wording (for the same events), content and order suggests the gospel writers had common sources (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 139). To assume that the synoptic gospels were written completely independently is not a sensible option - there is just too much internal evidence indicating otherwise (Fee & Stuart 1993, p. 122).

The search for sources is much easier and less speculative when there are several parallel accounts, like those found in the synoptic gospels. By examining parallel accounts and noting the agreements and disagreements in wording, ordering of material, omissions, style, ideas and theology and taking into account statements made by church fathers, it is possible to derive hypothetical sources of the synoptic gospels (Marshall 1985, p. 140-144). If a story is unique to a particular gospel then searching for breaks and dislocations in narrative sequence, stylistic inconsistency, theological inconsistency and historical inconsistency may also be helpful in determining possible sources (Marshall 1985, p. 144-145).

It will not always be possible to identify the written or oral sources of a particular account. This does not mean that the account should not be trusted (Marshall 1985, p. 146). In any case, several gospel writers (Matthew, John and perhaps Mark) were actual eye-witnesses.

The Two-Source or Oxford hypothesis is the one accepted by the vast majority of scholars (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 144). This hypothesis states that Mark and a hypothetical document called Q, were the basis for Matthew and Luke. It is suggested that Q contains the verses common to Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark. Matthew and Luke were composed using a combination of Mark, Q and possibly other sources (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 143-144).

Evaluation of Source Criticism

If the sources of an account can be identified, it is possible to learn a great deal. The fact that Matthew and Luke usually agree with Mark on the actual words of Jesus indicates they both wanted to preserve Mark's tradition rather than just make up their own. Source criticism can reveal something about the author's method of writing

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and particular interests and ideas (Stein 1988, p. 144). For example, Matthew seems to focus on the Jews but to be sure of this we need to know what his sources were. If his source was Mark, then this is a reasonable conclusion but if it was the traditions of the Jerusalem church, then this Jewish focus would be inherent in the source rather than Matthew's interest (Marshall 1985, p. 147).

Hermeneutical insights may also be gained. If the earliest text form of an event can be recovered, then it will be possible to see how each gospel writer interpreted that event and how they modified it to emphasise that interpretation (Stein 1988, p. 151).

Many critics have viewed source modifications as corruptions or errors but these changes were made under the inspiration of the Spirit and are still authoritative. It should also be noted that the canonical text form is inspired. A hypothetical reconstruction of the text is not. It is unwise to make hypothetical sources the basis for theology.

The Two-Source hypothesis makes some questionable affirmations in regard to Q material and material unique to Matthew or Luke. Q is a purely hypothetical document and it is highly unlikely that it was a single written source. It is far more probable that it was a collection of documents. However, the possibility of the existence of Q-like documents is beyond doubt since the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas (Stein 1988, p. 109). Also, material that is unique to either Matthew or Luke is assumed to come from another source other than Mark or Q. But this may not be the case. It is possible that Matthew included a saying from Q that Luke did not and vice versa.

Form (Genre) Criticism

Form criticism assumes an oral tradition behind the written text and is interested in its transition from the pre-literary form to the literary form. Here we study the various literary genres or forms.

At this stage an attempt is made to classify the material into particular genres so that one could propose a common life setting for each genre. Even though this is related to source criticism, here the emphasis is mainly on trying to understand the particular life setting (*Sitz im Leben* or the vital context) of particular ideas. The analysis of different forms used by the writers takes us down much smaller units of material (unlike in the analysis of the sources). For the OT,

Gunkel, and for the NT, his disciples Dibelius and Bultmann made important contributions in this regard.

The Scandinavian School considered the basic units as myths, hymns, blessings, curses, laments, proverbs, oracles, and love songs in the OT to have been transmitted in oral form. This school proposes a liturgical setting (*Sitz im Leben*) as the means through which these forms were preserved.

For German and English scholars, literal forms (written forms) were important—myths, codes, short stories, letters, archival records, genealogies, legends, parables etc. They consider that the prophets, priests, and scribes were the groups which preserved these.

In the NT, the Epistles were written compositions from the beginning, whereas the Gospels were more dependent upon a long oral tradition. Even though shorter forms – parables, sayings, discourses, short stories, miracles and riddles may be detected, the basic kerygmatic form probably lay behind the formation of the Gospels; smaller forms were preached in various communities, and they were adapted and expanded over a period of time.

Explanation of Form Criticism

Form criticism seeks to get behind the written sources by studying and analysing the “form” of individual gospel traditions. It describes the characteristics of the various forms and how they emerged in the period of oral transmission in the church (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 176).

The basic axioms of form criticism are as follows:

1. The gospels are “popular” or “folk” literature and are not the work of just one person but belong to a community. These communities shaped the stories they contain (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 178). Therefore the gospel authors were not authors in the true sense but collectors and editors (Marshall 1985, p. 153).
2. Most of the material circulated orally and as individual units for at least 20 years (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 178).
3. Units of tradition were used as the occasion required. Only useful traditions were retained. Only rarely are they recorded in chronological order (Marshall 1985, p. 154).

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4. As units were used they took on a particular form according to their function in the community. The form reflects the thoughts of the early church (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 176). Therefore it is possible to deduce a unit's "life-setting" (German: Sitz im Leben) from its form. (Marshall 1985, p. 154). Life-setting denotes an area of church life such as worship, teaching and evangelism and only rarely does it indicate the actual historical situation that gave rise to the tradition (Marshall 1985, p. 154).
5. Form criticism assumes the results of source criticism and tradition criticism (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 179).

Rudolf Bultman and Martin Dibelius have identified the following forms:

1. **Paradigms/Pronouncement Stories:** These are brief stories which culminate in an authoritative saying of Jesus or a saying about the reaction of on-lookers (Marshall 1985, p. 155).
2. **Legends/Stories about Jesus:** These are stories told to exalt a great figure and present a person as an example to follow. The term legend does not necessarily mean they are unhistorical although this is often the assumption (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 184).
3. **Tales/Miracle Stories:** These are self-contained highly descriptive stories that show pleasure in giving details (Marshall 1985, p. 156).
4. **Sayings/Exhortations:** This is independent teaching material such as wisdom sayings, prophetic sayings, legal sayings and "I" sayings (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 184).
5. **Myths:** These are narratives showing interactions between mythological characters and humans. The supernatural breaks into human domain (Marshall 1985, p. 157).

Form criticism has exegetical implications in passages like Mark 2:18-20. Mark 2:18-19a is a pronouncement story but vv. 19b-20 do not fit this form. Therefore they must be an addition by the early church (Marshall 1985, p. 159).

Evaluation of Form Criticism

One of the problems with form criticism is the form categories are often based on content rather than actual form. Although form and

content do influence each other, some categories are simply stylistic descriptions. Also, many sayings and stories have no “common” form and many have “mixed” form. Some may even fall into multiple categories (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 187). If forms have no or little distinction then they couldn’t have been created and shaped by the early church, as claimed by many form critics (Marshall 1985, p. 158-159).

For Mark 2:18-20, it all depends on the definition of “pronouncement story”. What if the definition is too rigid. Form critics talk about “law of tradition” as if they are well proven scientific laws of development of oral traditions. This is not the case. Except for Luke, the gospel writers were Jews and therefore it is reasonable to assume transmission of traditions would have occurred in a similar fashion to Rabbinic teachings. Rabbis were concerned with accurate transmission and so would the early church (Stein 1988, p. 187-192). The probability of eyewitnesses keeping checks on the integrity of the traditions is also disregarded by many form critics (Stein 1988, p. 193-203).

Form criticism does have some positive insights. It does help in understanding the period between AD 30 and AD 50. Searching for the *Sitz im Leben* aids exegesis because knowing how the tradition functioned in the early church indicates how it should speak today. However, this is not always possible. The early church preserved traditions because they were useful. This helps to understand that the gospels are practical references not just biographies of Jesus. Understanding the form is also very important for accurate exegesis (Marshall 1985, p. 161).

The descriptive features of form criticism provide the greatest aid to interpretation. They help to focus on the author’s style and structure of argument (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 192).

The emphasis of form critics is on the community as the great preserver and inspirer of tradition.

Tradition Criticism

Traditional Criticism is interested in the context in which an idea is expressed in a particular book of the Bible. It deals with the theological influences on the writers themselves. Tradition criticism presupposes that the writer has absorbed his ideas from the through-word and

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from the key religious ideas prevalent in his day. These theological traditions could have been either in oral form or (already) in literary works. In the OT, the traditions of creation and of exodus recur very often in different books (in Psalms, proverbs, Wisdom, and Sirach). The tradition of creation itself is expressed in many ways (e.g. to express God's greatness in his bringing the whole cosmos into being, or to express his love and kindness in his bringing each human life into being). The tradition of Zion is concerned with God's defence of the city and his dwelling in the temple there in order to protect his people in times of distress and need. The tradition of the king David – recalling God's promise to be always with his people through an anointed figure who would lead the people in Justice and mercy on his behalf – is also an important theological idea. A tradition need not necessarily be an overreaching theological theme, but may simply be a theological statement in a phrase such as 'God reigns'.

In the NT, the larger tradition themes may be found mainly in the Gospels, especially in Mathew and in Luke. This would include the birth and the passion narratives, the accounts of resurrection, the reference to the prophecy being fulfilled (seen especially in Mt), the references to the kingdom of God breaking into history (for example in Lk 17:18), the hope for the future culmination of history (as in Lk 24), and allusions to God's intimate care for his created order (Mt 6:25-34). All of these suggest the effect of the received tradition on the mind of the author rather than on the importance of the tradition in the mind of the community.

Tradition criticism is concerned with the influence of the various theological beliefs on the mind of the writer. In this sense the point of emphasis is the substance of the message rather than the form taken by the message (as was the case in the preceding step[s]). It is also interested in finding the influence of any of the traditions upon the development of the text at various stages in the history of its transmission and also on the role of the community in shaping the tradition itself. Thus, it is interested mainly in the theological development of the text.

Explanation of Tradition Criticism

Tradition criticism is used to determine the development of traditions from Jesus through the early church to the gospel writer and forms

the basis for form and redaction criticism. It is an attempt to trace the evolution of the form and/or meaning of concepts, words or sayings. For example, tradition criticism is interested in how a parable developed into 2 or 3 different versions (Marshall 1985, p. 165-166). The basic axioms behind tradition criticism force the critic to be highly sceptical about the authenticity or historicity of the traditions as they are recorded in the gospels. The burden of proof lies with those who wish to take the traditions as historical (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 204).

The 3 basic axioms for determining authentic traditions, rather than those created and modified by the early church are listed in Black & Dockery (1991, p. 205) and are as follows:

1. ***Dissimilarity***: they are not parallels of Jewish traditions and not reflections of the faith and practices of the early church.
2. ***Multiple attestation***: whether or not a saying occurs in more than one gospel.
3. ***Coherence***: if the saying in question has the same form of another saying that has already been shown to be authentic (using the above criteria), then this saying should also be regarded as authentic.

Tradition criticism may be applied to Peter's confession in Mark 8:29 and parallels. Luke adds the words "of God", Matthew adds "the Son of the Living God" and John has "the holy One of God". Therefore, since these 4 parallels each say something different, it is highly unlikely (or so it is claimed) that this saying is actually historical (Marshall 1985, p. 167).

Using tradition criticism some critics have shown that Matthew 18:17 is not authentic, because it goes against the parable of Wheat and Tares and the Dragnet (Matthew 13:47f). It also presupposes a Jewish audience which excludes Gentiles and tax collectors. This is unlike the "historical Jesus" who embraced such people, therefore it must be a later development of the church (Marshall 1985, p. 168).

Evaluation of Tradition Criticism

Tradition criticism has done much to undermine the integrity of the gospel accounts. It is far too sceptical and its conclusions are often devoid of supporting evidence. The axioms for determining authenticity

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leave much to be desired. The criteria of dissimilarity is far too narrow and therefore only identifies the unique Jesus. It is ridiculous to expect Jesus' teaching would not have overlapped with Jewish teaching, especially since both were rooted in the Old Testament. It is even more ridiculous to expect Jesus' teaching to have contributed nothing to the early church. Responding to the message of Jesus is the very essence of Christianity (Marshall 1985, p. 174). The criteria of multiple attestation ignores the purpose and inspired overall theological agenda of the gospel author (Marshall 1985, p. 176).

For Matthew 18:17, it seems that this verse has not been correctly understood. This verse is not a put-down of gentiles and tax collectors but simply stating that we should treat unrepentant Christians the same way we would treat non-Christians. How should we treat non-Christians? The same way Christ did (cf. Matthew 9:10-12, Matthew 15:22-28).

There are 4 gospels that do not oppose one another. Therefore it is best to assume everything is authentic unless there is concrete evidence to the contrary. Although the gospels may not record Jesus' actual words (he spoke in Aramaic and the New Testament was written in Greek) or forms, they do record His essential message for humanity. Any modification of traditions by the gospel authors were done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Redaction Criticism/Editorial Criticism

This proceeds from the assumption that the individual authors of the biblical books had a strong influence on their eventual form and on the analyses of the composition of these texts from the perspective of the final redactor.

The whole emphasis of the historical-critical (diachronic) inquiry up to this stage (i.e. the preceding 7 stages) has been to explain the text through the study of its origin and development within a diachronic perspective. At this last stage, however, the exegete proceeds on the synchronic level and tries to explain the text as it now stands on the basis of the mutual relationship between its diverse elements, not forgetting the scope of the original author to communicate a message to his contemporaries.

Redaction analysis is the most clear and obvious of the methods of historical reading. Redaction criticism studies the modifications that the texts have undergone before being fixed in their final state. It also analyzes this final stage, trying as far as possible, to identify the tendencies particularly characteristic of this concluding process. Its concern is the present state of the text with what the final editors of the texts actually believed. His is the ultimate voice within the text.

For instance, in Isaiah one is interested in knowing the theological intentions of the editor who sewed together the three major prophetic works (Is 1-39; 40-55; 56-66). In the NT the main area of interest has been the Synoptic Gospels and in identifying the overall theological tendencies of the writers of the Gospels. At this level the exegete tries to discover the Gospel writer's or editor's distinctive personal contribution within the complex mass of inherited material. Sometimes this influence is traced back to the material which include the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), or the sevenfold group of parables about the kingdom (Mt 13), or the collection of woes against the scribes and Pharisees (Mt 23).

Whether we assume this to be about the personal contribution of the actual Gospel-writers or of the editors and compilers of the Gospels in a later generation, the major significance of redaction criticism is that its emphasis is very much on the contributions of individuals rather than of great communities.

Explanation of Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism builds on the results of source and tradition criticism. It treasures and examines the editorial work of gospel authors in order to see their emphases and purposes (Stein 1988, p. 238). It seeks to uncover the theology and setting of the author by studying the way they modified traditions, arranged them and stitched them together. It asks why the author included, excluded or modified a particular tradition and tries to identify distinctive patterns, interests and theological ideas (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 199-200).

Redaction Criticism involves analysing individual traditions comparing it with parallels, in order to identify common and unique phrases and words. It also involves analysing the whole gospel in comparison with other gospels. The seams (introductions and

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conclusions) link traditions together, provide setting and often theological emphasis. Summaries and traditions structure give clues to major theological overtones. Unique elements indicate which way the story is going and repeated phrases show emphasis and special interests. As the gospel unfolds individual traditions interact to produce the intended message (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 208-211). Considering an author's vocabulary and style is also helpful (Marshall 1985, p. 185).

Evaluation of Redaction Criticism

Results of redaction criticism are highly subjective and should not be accepted uncritically. The huge variation in results shows this clearly (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 213). There is no doubt that gospel authors shaped and modified traditions to fit their gospel's purpose but presuppositions about the nature of traditions, their transmission and modification are suspect. "Redaction" does not mean unhistorical "theologising" (Marshall 1985, p. 187-188). Many critics are highly sceptical and assume every redaction is a creation and therefore unhistorical. However, omission and addition are not criteria for historicity but for style, emphasis and purpose. Not every jot and tittle carries theological weight (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 213). It should also be noted that meaning is found in the overall pericope not the redactions (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 215).

History and theology are not mutually exclusive. There is no reason why an author can not emphasise a theological concept using an historical event. Gospel authors were interpreters but there is no reason to assume they were misinterpreters.

Redaction criticism is still an important tool. It shows how inspiration took place when authors selected, arranged and highlighted various traditions in order to communicate a special message to their readers (Black & Dockery 1991, p. 216). This gives the gospels their individual character and is why we have four of them (Marshall 1985, p. 191).

Canonical Criticism

Canonical criticism is considered as an extension of the interest in the final product evident in redaction criticism. Canonical criticism examines each passage in the light of the whole Bible, wherein other books, passages offer insights.

Evaluation: Diachronic Study

- i) Historical criticism has shown that the Bible, which as a collection of writings is not the creation of a single author especially in the case of the OT, has had a long pre-history.
- ii) One should know that the historical-critical method restricts itself to a search for the meaning of a biblical text within the historical circumstance that gave rise to it. It is not concerned with other possibilities of meaning which have been revealed at later stages of the biblical revelation and history of the Church.
- iii) In its desire to establish the chronology of the biblical texts the critical study was mostly restricted, especially at the initial stage, to the task of dissecting and dismantling the text in order to identify the various sources without paying much attention to the final form of the text and to the message which it conveyed, or to the state in which it actually exists (the contribution of the editors was not held in high regard).
- iv) The influence of comparative study of the history of religions and certain philosophical ideas sometimes have cast some doubts and shadows on the application of historical-critical method.
- v) There have been attempts in the past to give greater insistence to the form of the text, with less attention paid to the content, which, however, has been rectified in recent decades through the study of the text from the point of view of action and life.
- vi) Diachronic study remains indispensable for making known the historical dynamism which animates Sacred Scripture and for shedding light upon its rich complexity.

Modern Methods of Literary (Synchronic) Analysis

First we must know the specific nature of literary analysis which somehow distinguishes it from diachronic methods.

1. Historical criticism, often known as diachronic method, looks through the different layers of the text and the process of editing which have brought the text to its present form, whereas literary

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- criticism, also known as synchronic method (syn ‘together with’ or ‘along side’), is concentrated on the present form of the text.
2. Historical criticism the dialogue is within the text throughout its past history; literary criticism, rather asks questions about the shape of the text in the here and now.
 3. In historical criticism the dialogue is within the text throughout its past history whereas in literary criticism, the dialogue is with the text with the present concerns of the reader foremost in mind.
 4. Historical criticism is interested in the meaning of the text understood through the concerns of the ancient author; in literary criticism the meaning is sought in the language and style and within the text itself, understood through the concerns of the present-day reader.
 5. With the help of source criticism, form criticism (genre criticism), and tradition critical method scholars try to see how the text was brought together. Under the categories of priest and structure criticism, literary analysts investigate how the text works for the readers (and not for the writers).
 6. In historical-critical method the interest of those who formed the text in its final stages is demonstrated through redaction criticism (and in canon criticism). In literary criticism the interest shown by the readers in giving new meanings to the text, albeit after its final form, is the point of emphasis.

In literary studies, especially in the ‘reader-response theories’, rhetorical criticism and narrative analysis the reader enters into a discourse with the text, asking questions about its assumptions and its ideologies. From this one asks questions also about the intended audience (the ancient one) and the actual audience (the contemporary one). The reader will be further led to ask questions regarding the theological meaning of the text today.

Narrative Analysis

On the whole the Bible is the story of salvation. It narrates the story of God’s dealing with man. The OT may be seen as a recital of God’s story with Israel through her profession of faith, Liturgy, and catechesis (Ps 78:3-4; Ex 12:24-27; Deut 6:20-25; 26:5-11). In the

NT the Christian kerygma recounts the story of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus (see the passion narratives in the Gospels). In Acts 2:23-36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 10:34-43 we see this history of salvation in a nutshell.

Narrative analysis offers a method for understanding and communicating the biblical message which corresponds to the form of story and personal witness. It is particularly attentive to those elements in the text which have to do with plot, characterization, and the point of view of the narrator. It studies how a text tells a story so as to engage the reader in its 'narrative world' and the system of values contained therein.

The characteristic feature of this type of analysis is that it looks at the whole unit. The doublets repetitions, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the translated text are included in the whole. They enable us to understand the variety and balance in the text and they enrich our knowledge of the text as a whole. One can thus create a theology which can unite the text as a whole. This theology is created by the text and not by the author. The emphasis is on the whole story and there is no concern here for the smaller parts which may have made up the whole.

To understand how narrative analysis can be helpful in biblical studies one must know the following distinctions:

1. Real author and implied author: The real author is any person who actually composed the story. The implied author is the figure of the author which the text progressively creates in the mind of the reader in the course of reading (with his culture, character, inclinations, faith, etc.).
2. Real reader and implied reader: The real reader is any person who has access to the text. The implied reader is the reader whom the text presupposes and in effect creates, the one who is capable of performing the mental and affective operations necessary for entering into the narrative world of the text and responding to it in the way envisaged by the real author through the instrumentality of the implied author. The influence of the text depends on the extent to which the real reader is capable of identifying himself/herself with the implied reader. The main task of exegesis consists

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in effecting and facilitating this process of identification with the implied reader.

3. Text as Window and Mirror: Narrative analysis is concerned with the way a text works. Historical-critical analysis views the text as a window which gives access to one or another period (of the situation of the community for whom the story is old). Narrative analysis views the text as a mirror, in the sense that it projects a certain image, the narrative world, which in turn, influences the perception of the reader in such a way as to cause him to adopt certain values rather than others.

Theological Reflection: This literary type of inquiry in the narrative analysis of the biblical text also contains a certain type of theological reflection. The implications of the story character of Scripture involve the consent of faith and one derives from this a hermeneutics of a more practical and pastoral character. Narrative analysis can help biblical interpretation as it permits adapting the biblical modes of communicating and conveying meaning in the actual historical context of the readers, and thereby it can help to open up more effectively the saving power of the biblical texts to the reader.

Narrative analysis has a twofold function as far as it is applied to the biblical text; it underlines the need of telling the story of salvation (informative dimension) in a way that the reader is capable of understanding it. This very telling of the story is oriented to salvation (of the reader). This is the performative dimension of recounting the story. This very mode of presenting the message of salvation thus functions as an existential appeal addressed to the reader.

Evaluation: The application of the narrative analysis in explaining the biblical story of salvation can facilitate the transition from the meaning of the text in its historical context (which is the prime interest of historical-critical studies) to its significance for the reader of today. However, one must also know that when it is employed in reading the biblical texts, a rigid application of pre-established models cannot do justice to the specific character of these texts as the inspired word. It must also be supplemented by diachronic studies. Moreover caution must be observed because a one-sided narrative analysis may tend to exclude any doctrinal elaboration of the content of the biblical narratives

and thereby it can be out of step with the authentic biblical tradition itself.

Structuralist (semiotic) Analysis

This is concerned with the message itself, understood as an autonomous and self-contained entity, without taking into consideration the relation with sender and receiver. The structure that is detected is not the outline that meets the eye, for the deepest structures are not apparent on the surface but help to generate the text. These structures must be brought to light in order that the text can be perceived as a coherent whole.

In the interpretation of the biblical texts, several basic concepts of the structural approach are of special significance:

1. The autonomy of the texts. A text contains a self-contained unit, and its different parts should be explained in terms of their relation to each other and not in terms of some external cause or authority.
2. The emphasis is on synchronic rather than diachronic relations. It is not the history of the text which holds the key to its meaning but the relations of the textual elements as they stand. Hence the need is for a “text-immanent” exegesis which takes the text seriously as a network of relations.
3. The structure of the text and the techniques of its analysis become an important consideration. Different types can be distinguished: linguistic, literary, narrative, discursive, rhetorical, or thematic structures, each requiring its own form analysis.

Modern Contextual Interpretations

The present day contextual interpretations such as Liberation interpretation, Feminist interpretation, Indian interpretation, or Black interpretation stem from contextual approaches to biblical and theological interpretations. These interpretations argue that without engaging in concrete historical praxis no genuine interpretations of the day as the result of ideological speculation, presuppositions, illusions, and systematic distortions.

The various modern contextual interpretations make effective use of the biblical text for interpretation. That way they contribute to the

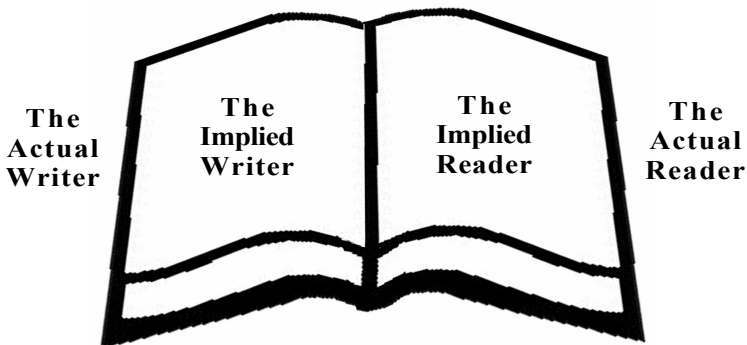
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richness of biblical interpretation by making present the biblical text in the contemporary context but often they disregard or destroy the original writer's intention and the context. Here interpretations become unauthentic and relative.

Reader-response criticism

The systematic examination of the aspects of the text that arouse, shape, and guide a reader's response. According to reader-response criticism, the reader is a producer rather than a consumer of meanings. In this sense, a reader is a hypothetical construct of norms and expectations that can be derived or projected or extrapolated from the work and may even be said to inhere in the work. Because expectations may be violated or fulfilled, satisfied or frustrated, and because reading is a temporal process involving memory, perception, and anticipation, the charting of reader-response is extremely difficult and perpetually subject to construction and reconstruction, vision and revision.

Reader-response criticism, however, does not denote any specific theory. It can range from the phenomenological theories of Wolfgang Iser and Roman Ingarden - both of whom argue that although the reader fills in the gaps, the author's intentional acts impose restrictions and conditions - to the relativistic analysis of Stanley Fish, who argues that the interpretive strategy of the reader creates the text, there being no text except that which a reader or an interpretive community of readers creates.



The significance of the image above shall be revealed in due course. Just make a mental note of it for now.

Implied author

The implied author is a concept of literary criticism developed in the twentieth century. It is distinct from the real author and the narrator. The distinction from the real author lies in that the implied author consists solely of what can be deduced from the work. The implications of the work may paint a rather different picture of the author than might be deduced from their real life. The distinction from the narrator is most clear in ironic works such as “A Modest Proposal”, where the narrator cheerfully offers his proposal, but the implied author is as aware as the reader of the horror of what is proposed. It is important in a wide variety of literary criticism, including structuralism, deconstructionism, and rhetoric-based criticism such as that of Wayne C. Booth.

Implied Reader - A term used by Wolfgang Iser to describe a hypothetical reader of a text. The implied reader “embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect - predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader.”

The next step is to become more conscious of the whole reading-writing dichotomy. Every text is produced by an actual writer (a real person), who in the act of writing automatically places in the text a version of him/herself, the implied writer (a persona or role played by the real person writing). What may not be so obvious at first is that the implied writer automatically creates a mirror image of another persona, the implied reader, which the actual reader reading the text in question is implicitly asked to play (along with). This complex interaction between real persons playing roles both in the act of writing and in the act of reading should get a special lift in our understanding as we reflect on the fact that the Latin origin of the modern English word “person” is *persona*, meaning “mask,” originally a hand-held mask that actors on the classical stage used to cover their faces with while playing their roles. Both writing and reading are, in fact, acts - that is, roles that writers and readers voluntarily take on.

Chapter 11

Finality of Revelation

The finality of revelation in the person of Jesus, as argued by DV is seriously challenged and called into question for a radical reformation. The movement had already started with the rise of neo-Protestant theology in the eighteenth century and neo-Catholic theology in the twentieth century, the exclusivistic claims of traditional Christian faith are radically called into question. Schleiermacher (d. 1834) made this idea clearer in his famous statement: “Let none offer the seekers a system making exclusive claim to truth, but let each man offer his characteristic, individual presentation.”¹

The new trend had reached its zenith with the rise of the “theology of religions,” that challenged the traditional understanding of the uniqueness of Christian revelation.² For example, Paul Knitter argues that we need to “recognize the possibility that other ‘saviours’ have carried out... for other people” the redemptive work which as Christians we know in Jesus Christ. For Knitter the common ground of religion exists in the struggle to liberate the oppressed peoples of the world.³ Allowing for other savior figures besides Christ has led to the

accusation of a “Christian polytheism.” Hans Küng went to the extent of affirming that a person “is to be saved within the religion that is made available to him in his historical situation. Hence it is right and his duty to seek God within that religion in which the hidden God has already found him.”⁴ Calling for a “global religious vision,” John Hick avers that it is no longer necessary “to insist... upon the uniqueness and superiority of Christianity; and it may be possible to recognize the separate validity of the other great world religions...”⁵

The reasons for the relativisation of Christian dogmas according to Cardinal Ratzinger is manifold: The radical opposition posited between the logical mentality of the West and the symbolic mentality of the East; the subjectivism that regards reason as the only source of knowledge, the metaphysical emptying of the historical incarnation of the Eternal Logos, reduced to a mere appearing of God in history; the eclecticism of theologians who uncritically absorb ideas from a variety of philosophical and theological contexts without regard for consistency with Christian truth and the tendency to read and to interpret Sacred Scripture outside the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church (*DI*, 3).

The Perimeters of Theology

In tracing the various global and Indian trends that deny the finality of revelation, we prefer to locate three such major domains: (i) Trinitarian domain, (ii) Christological domain, ecclesiological domain. In what follows we will analyse these domains succinctly.

Trinitarian Domain

The most fundamental Christian doctrine of Trinity is subjected to serious scrutiny in the contemporary theological circles. One may even suspect that the ancient Trinitarian heresies are revisiting us. Apart from being heresies these new hermeneutics of the doctrines are paving way for a great amount of confusion in theology. Certain influential hermeneutical approaches in Trinitarian theology are analysed under this session.

Unresolved Tension between Trinity and Incarnation

In the theology of religions two extreme positions are suggested regarding the relationship between the mystery of Holy Trinity and incarnated Son of God. On the one hand certain theologians, for

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example Reimundo Panikkar in the East, are emphasising the importance of Holy Trinity at the outlay of the mystery of incarnation. According to them the incarnated Jesus is only a means for getting access to the mystery of the Trinity. On the other hand, certain theologians, for example Hans Kung in the West, argue that the doctrine of Trinity, which is biblically unfounded, is a real obstruction in the theology of religion.

Against the western dialectical approach to the understanding of reality, Reimundo Panikkar proposes the holistic approach of the advaitic intuition as the adequate epistemological principle to comprehend the reality. To proclaim Jesus apart from the mystery of the Holy trinity, according to him, is to preach him as an idol. Such an approach, according to Panikkar, would result in evaluating Christians by Hindus as “people who worship God under the name and form of Jesus.”⁶ Reality, according to Panikkar, is three dimensional, cosmotheandric or theanthropocosmic. Panikkar is of the opinion that when we limit the reality of Christ exclusively to the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, we are restricting, if not denying his divinity. According to him, what the Christians have to proclaim is the Trinitarian Christ, who is not “exhausted” in time, who alone can be totally human and totally divine.⁷ The uniqueness of Christ lays in his ability to relate with the entire world on behalf God and to God on behalf of the human beings. To identify Christ, who according to Panikkar is the symbol of relationship between God and man, to any historical figure is “idolatry” and “sin against the Spirit.”⁸ The historical figure of Jesus is significant for Panikkar only in so far as it helps us to go deeper into the trans-historical mystery of Christ the Lord, that is the Christ of Trinity. Here Panikkar’s view is similar to that of Stanley Samartha who argues that one should not limit Christ to Jesus nor elevate Jesus to the status of God, because in the former we turn Christ into a tribal God of the Christians and in the latter we fall into Christo-monism.⁹

Hans Kung, on the other hand critiques the doctrine of the Trinity as it relates to inter-religious dialogue between adherents of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He argues: I shall try to sum up in three sentences what seems to me to be the biblical nucleus of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, in light of the New Testament considered for today: ¹⁰

- To believe in God the Father means to believe in the one God, creator, preserver and perfecter of the world and humankind; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have this belief in one God in common.
- To believe in the Holy Spirit means to believe in God's effective might and power in human beings and the world: Jews, Christians, and Muslims also have this belief in God's Spirit in common.
- To believe in the Son of God means to believe in the revelation of the one God in the man Jesus of Nazareth who is thus God's Word, Image and Son.

Kung redefines the doctrine of the Trinity as follows: (1) the one God is exclusively the Father, (2) the Holy Spirit is the power of God, and (3) Jesus' uniqueness is that God the Father has revealed Himself fully in Him. Kung adds, "For the New Testament, as for the Hebrew Bible, the principle of unity is clearly the one God (ho theos: the God = the Father).

There is probably no better story in the New Testament to show us the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit than that of the speech made by the proto-martyr Stephen in his own defence, which has been handed down to us by Luke in his Acts of the Apostles. During this speech Stephen had a vision: But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." So here we have God, Jesus the Son of Man, and the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul sees this in a very similar way: God himself creates salvation through Jesus Christ in the Spirit.

Ecclesial Economy of the Incarnated Word and the Universal Mission of the Eternal Word

Exploring the possibilities within the theological distinction between immanent and economic Trinity, certain contemporary theologians have come up with the two missions of the Word in the two dimensions of the Trinity. As *Dominus Iesus* had pointed out the contemporary trend of presenting two economies of salvation, that is, universal economy of the eternal Word and the ecclesial economy of the incarnated Word, is detrimental to the doctrine of the Church. The document

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emphatically rejects: “the thesis of a twofold salvific economy, that of the eternal Word, which would be universal and valid also outside the Church, and that of the incarnate Word, which would be limited to Christians.” The declaration reasserts the unicity of the salvific economy of the one incarnate Word, Jesus Christ “and insists that his paschal mystery is “the sole and universal source of salvation for all humanity.” As Richard P. McBrien of Notre Dame University observes, “No evolutionary or universal Christology is consistent with the Catholic tradition which breaks the unique and definitive connection between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of the cosmos.”¹¹

The problem involved in delineating between the missions of the Word had already been suggested by John Paul II as he explicitly declared: “To introduce any sort of separation between the Word and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian faith... Jesus is the Incarnate Word - a single and indivisible person... Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth; he is the Word of God made man for the salvation of all... In the process of discovering and appreciating the manifold gifts - especially the spiritual treasures - that God has bestowed on every people, we cannot separate those gifts from Jesus Christ, who is at the centre of God’s plan of salvation.”¹²

The separation between the Incarnated logos and the eternal logos is usually made with the intention of presenting historical complementary with other revelatory and salvific figures. More concretely, for some, Jesus would be one of the many faces which the Logos has assumed in the course of time to communicate with humanity in a salvific way. Again the suggestion of the mission of the eternal Word somehow tries to delimit the scope of the salvific mission of the Church. The economy of the eternal Word is often argued to be unrelated to the Church and is valid also outside the Church. The mission of the eternal Logos would have a greater universal value than the mission of the incarnated Logos, which is limited to Christians.

This suggestion of the two missions of the Word is against the teachings of the Councils that taught, “the one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man..., one in being with the Father according to the divinity and one in being with us according to the humanity..., begotten of the Father before the ages according to

the divinity and, in these last days, for us and our salvation, of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, according to the humanity.”

It is likewise contrary to the Catholic faith to introduce a separation between the salvific action of the Word as such and that of the Word made man. With the incarnation, all the salvific actions of the Word of God are always done in unity with the human nature that he has assumed for the salvation of all people. The one subject which operates in the two natures, human and divine, is the single person of the Word.¹³

Mission of Jesus and the Mission of the Holy Spirit

There is a growing tendency to separate the salvific mission of the Holy Spirit from that of the historical Jesus. The Catholic faith emphatically says that the salvific work of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from that of the risen Christ, because there is only a single Trinitarian economy, willed by the Father and realized in the mystery of Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit. Several theological problems are involved in this vision of separation between the Christological and Pneumatological missions:

1. It denies the salvific incarnation of the Word as a trinitarian event. In the New Testament, the mystery of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, constitutes the place of the Holy Spirit's presence as well as the principle of the Spirit's effusion on humanity, not only in messianic times (cf. *Acts* 2:32-36; *Jn* 7:39, 20:22; *1 Cor* 15:45), but also prior to his coming in history (cf. *1 Cor* 10:4; *1 Pet* 1:10-12). The Father's salvific plan for all humanity includes the mystery of the Christ event which is done in communion with his Spirit.

2. It is not theologically fair to state that the salvific action of Jesus Christ is limited within the Church while that of the Spirit is extended beyond the Church. Christ with and through his Spirit, extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church to all humanity. II Vatican Council explains the impact of the paschal mystery as, “All this holds true not only for Christians but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.”

3. The Spirit who is actively and dynamically present in the heart of the people, cultures and religions who sows the ‘seeds of the word’

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present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ, is the same Spirit who was at work in the incarnation and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and who is at work in the Church. Any attempt to separate these missions is contradicting the truth.

4. There is only one salvific economy of the One and Triune God, realized in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, actualized with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, and extended in its salvific value to all humanity and to the entire universe (*DI*, 12).

We shall not be tempted to think that the Catholic faith denies the possibility of mission of the Holy Spirit outside the frontiers of the Church. As Walter Kasper says, “The Spirit of God is present and at work everywhere, limited by neither space nor time”. The Spirit “can be at work outside the visible Church and... in diverse ways... does act in a hidden manner”. Bishop Kasper reminds us, “rejected the old, exclusionary theory and practice, according to which, since Jesus Christ is the one and only mediator of salvation, outside *of* acknowledging him, i.e., ‘outside the Church,’ there is no salvation...”. “The most profound reason that profession of faith in the one God does not rescind from diversity but rather includes it to a certain extent”, Walter Kasper points out, “lies in the Trinitarian confession of one God in three persons... It means that the one and only God is not a solitary God, but from eternity is self-giving love in which the Father communicates with the Son, and the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit”. It is this self-renunciation and selfless communication on the part of Jesus Christ that is the basis of his invitation to the other religions “to reach their own fullness and completion.”¹⁴

Christological Domain

The mystery of incarnation and the person of Jesus was a recurrent riddle in the theological circles even of the first centuries. Many of the errors in doctrine denounced in the early councils continue as errors of Christian faith today. Contemporary theologians carry the repercussions of those earlier heretical teachings by denying the divinity of Jesus by counting him to be a godly man with exemplary life and message. There are theological streams that deny the salvific significance of the Christ-event and the doctrine of the incarnation. Some of those trends are discussed in what follows:

Universalism versus Historicity in Christology

Denial of the traditional emphasis of the historical particularity of the Christ-event is one of the salient features of modern Christology particularly of Indian Christology. For example, Stanley Samartha argues, to make the claims regarding Christ “absolutely singular and to maintain that meaning of the Mystery is revealed only in one particular person and in one particular point, and nowhere else, is to ignore one’s neighbours who have other points of references.”¹⁵ The universal salvific plan of God is often considered to be the point of departure for Indian Christian theology. The Christ event is one of the several moments of the revelation of God’s universal salvific plan, which is being continually revealed through the mediation of the Spirit in other religious traditions as well.

Before analyzing the concept of pluralism, we shall not fail to observe that the term pluralism in the theology of religions has attained new semantic domains. As Terrence Merrigan has pointed out, many theologians see plurality as the “recognition of the co-validity and the co-efficacy of other religions.”¹⁶ He is of the opinion that, “Within the framework of pluralist discourse, the term ‘plurality’ no longer denotes the mere fact of multiplicity or diversity. It now includes the concept of “parity,” or at least of rough parity, that is to say, the quality or state of being equal or equivalent.”¹⁷ He summarises universalistic vision of the pluralist theologians into the following four points:

Humanity’s religious history is can only adequately be understood, as a *single, universal* process. (2) From a religious point of view, this process has its source/goal in an *ineffable mystery*. (3) Humanity’s one religious history is played out in *diverse cultural forms* (world’s religious traditions). (4) The truest expression of this history of this expression is the practice (*praxis*) which promotes human well-being.¹⁸

The pluralist theologians place Jesus’ history within the broader frame work of universal religious history. Pluralist theology does not begin with scripture or tradition but with the contemporary situation.

Another important attitude that is prevalent among the pluralistic theologians is that, “there is nothing intrinsically more secure in a knowledge of God which claims to rest on ‘certain historical events’ ... than in a knowledge of God which claims to rest upon more general

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historical experience (including that to which scripture bears witness) but which does not treat any particular events within that broad spectrum as essential.”¹⁹ There is a growing tendency among the scholars to deny the significance of the historicity of the Christ-event, in other words pluralist theologians pay little attention to explain what God has uniquely done in the historical person Jesus. For example, Knitter is more concerned with Jesus’ of praxis, Hick is most concerned with Jesus’ consciousness of God.²⁰

The concept of God maintained by the pluralists is radically different from the traditional views. Against the traditional Christian notion of the personal God, pluralists present God as a metaphysical principle. As A. Pragasam observes, “the God of pluralists is neither personal nor impersonal, being beyond these categories, it is seen as an abstract metaphysical principle out there.”²¹ He continues to argue that Hick’s concept of God as “real” and Smith’s concept of God “as transcendental” is guided by the principle of subjectivism, having no criteria to judge them. Unlike the Christian concept of God, “God of pluralism is beyond the modes of human conceptuality and demands nothing [neither obedience nor worship] from the believers.”²² Gavin D’Costa rightly deems that the God of the pluralists’ is “modernity’s God,”²³ because the pluralists totally disregard the significance of the historical dimension of divine revelation.

Leslie Newbigin, the Anglican bishop of Madras, in his approach to the theology of religions, criticises every attempt of the pluralist theologians to demean the significance of the person of Christ in the history of human salvation. He argues: “When it is said that ‘in Jesus Christ I perceive something of God,’ it is implied that we know enough about God apart from Jesus to be in a position to judge whether and to what extent we can recognise ‘something of him’ in Jesus.”²⁴

One shall not try to create the impression that Catholic tradition finds a dichotomy between universal salvific plan of God and the revelation in the person of Jesus. Karl Rahner, for example, suggests a wonderful link between these two realities. Rahner conceives categorical revelation as the historical display of the transcendental and supernatural experience of God. Transcendental revelation is always mediated in history, because the transcendental of human being has a history. There is a historical realisation and mediation of God’s self-communication in transcendental revelation, with Jesus

Christ as the climax.²⁵ Philip Endean points out two perspectives of Rahner's Christology: first Rahner sets his Christology within a vision of God's gracious gift of self to the cosmos, and second, for Rahner, grace in us and the hypostatic union in Jesus Christ, though inseparable, remains distinct."²⁶

Human being has an inclination to search for the infinite. He or she moves continuously from one horizon of knowledge to another hoping for the infinite. This mutual reaching out can be seen as the kernel of every religions. Religions expresses God's search for man and man's response to God and vice versa. According to Rahner, religious diversity is an inevitable consequence of humanity's historical nature. Christianity, the true religion, can take root only gradually. In the meantime, God employs the other religions to realise his salvific will in history (which of course, is not to say that these religions, as such, are willed by God)."²⁷ Jesus Christ is the perfect fruit of this mutual interaction. Rahner's theology of religion is essentially pneumatological. As Kärkäinen evaluates, transcendental experience of the Spirit is expressed in the religious traditions of the world and reaches its apex in the final self revelation of God in Christ. Other religions also have individual moments' of this kind, which makes those people "anonymous Christians."²⁸

For Rahner, anonymous Christianity "is lived by the members of other religious traditions in the sincere practice of their own traditions. Christian salvation reaches out to them, anonymously, through these traditions."²⁹ It shows that one can open himself to the mystery of Christ without being aware of the Gospel. Christ becomes present to the non-Christian religions efficaciously through his Spirit. Consequently, "Anonymous Christians are justified by God's grace and possess the Holy Spirit."³⁰ Jacques Dupuis says, an "Anonymous Christian is a Christian unawares," and the difference he sees between the anonymous and the explicit Christian is "partly one of subjective awareness (absent in the former, present in the latter) of being a Christian."³¹ By virtue of the grace of God, a person, even without hearing explicit preaching about the Christian God, qualifies himself or herself as an 'anonymous Christian' by accepting the grace "present in an implicit form whereby [the] person undertakes and lives the duty of each day in the quiet sincerity of patience, in devotion to his material duties and the demands made upon him by the person under

his care.”³² Rahner is influenced by the ancient patristic and biblical doctrine of universal salvation. Rahner writes, “as stages in history we might point, for instance to the teaching of Ambrose that even the Catechumen who dies before baptism can attain to salvation.”³³ By the phrase ‘anonymous Christians’ Rahner refers to those who participate in divine grace. No one is exempt from salvation because of divine mercy. The presence of Jesus in the cosmos invites us to look beyond Christianity and embrace everyone as children of God.

Relativised Inculturation Versus Revealed Religion

The relationship between Christianity and other religions was one of the most debated issue in Indian christological scenario. The western classification of the exclusive, inclusive and pluralist approaches in the theology of religion is generally unacceptable to most of the Indian theologians, because this approach, according to them, is more phenomenological rather than theological.³⁴ The ambiguity in defining the true nature of the relationship between Christianity and other religions is evident in the words of M. M. Thomas as he says, “today we are engaged in discovering a post-liberal and post-Kraemer theology of religions which emphasises a common humanity in Christ rather than a common religiosity. We have not come to anything like an adequate understanding of what God has been and is doing in and with other religions.”³⁵ The Christian claim of being the only *religio vera* is often a stumbling block to the Indian minds, according to whom all religious traditions are on the way to truth.

The inculturation approach, one of the leading trends in Indian Christology, make use of the indigenous Christological titles, such as *avatar* (the incarnate), *Adipurusha* (the original cosmic man),³⁶ *Satpurusha* (the cosmic spiritual principle)³⁷ etc. The rationale behind this approach is evident as Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya reasons,

The Hindu mind is extremely subtle and penetrative, but is opposed to the Greco-scholastic mind method of thinking. We must fall back on the vedantic method in formulating the catholic religion to our country men. In fact the Vedanta must be made to do the same service to the Catholic faith in India as was done by the Greek philosophy in Europe.³⁸

The pioneering attempts in this direction could be traced in the writings of Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656).³⁹ Denobili’s attempt was

condemned by Rome through two papal bulls: *Ex quo singularis* and *Omnium sollicitudinem*.⁴⁰ Following this papal bulls, as Jacob Kavunkal observes, Western missionaries to India had to take an oath before leaving their homeland, that they would not do any experimentation with the cultures and the religious mission lands.⁴¹ This prohibition which lasted until 1939 was a severe block for developing an indigenous theology in India.

Besides, the Diamper synod (1599) convoked by the Portuguese Archbishop Menezes, prevented the Indian Christians from any inter-religious interventions. It condemned the positive attitude of the indigenous Christians to the non-Christians. Act III, decree 4 of the synodal canon reads: “the idea that each one can be saved in his own religion and each religion is right is fully erroneous and a most shameful heresy. There is no religion in which we may be saved except the religion of Christ our saviour.”⁴² This shows that the inculturation approach in christology did not get red carpet welcome in India.

The inculturation approach was later followed by Keshab Chunder Sen (1838-1884) who interpreted the Christian doctrine of Trinity, using the Hindu vocabulary of Saccitananda. However, Sen’s Christology is overshadowed by the reminiscence of the early Christian heresy of adoptionism.⁴³ Swami Vivekananda (1861-1902), the Ramakrishna order of Hindu monks, had a great respect to Jesus. Jesus, according to him, is an *Avatar* who experiences his non-duality (*advaita*) with the Absolute. Following the Advaitic concept, Vivekananda called Christ a *Jivanmukta*.⁴⁴ It is obvious that for Vivekananda, Christ is only one among the many avatars of the absolute. Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1863-1907), a contemporary of Vivekananda and the first among the Indian Catholics to advocate for inculturation approach, made a distinction between the social and the supernatural aspect of Hinduism. According to him the pre-existent Christ is the transcendent image of Brahman. The hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Jesus is explained as the *nara-Hari* (man-God) union.⁴⁵

There were Christian missionaries who reviewed the Hindu culture positively in the light of the fulfillment theory. According to this view is the Indian religious culture is viewed as a *preparatio evangelii* and Christianity is the fulfillment or crown of Hinduism. J.N. Farquhar is

the main proponent of this view as it is evident from his famous work *The Crown of Hinduism*.⁴⁶

The inculturation approach is often guided by the philosophy of relativism. Cardinal Ratzinger exposes this dilemma more obviously,

Thus it now seems actually imperative in India, even for Christian theology, to extract from its particularity the figure of Christ, regarded as Western, and to set it beside Indian redemption myths as if it were of similar status: the historical Jesus, so people now think, is no more uniquely the Logos than any other savior figures from history are.⁴⁷

The inculturation approach is often accepted uncritically among the Indian theologians. Anyone who opposes the inculturation approach in Christology is often counted as intolerant and impatient to the cultural variety of the rich religious tradition of India. The problem to be addressed here is how far are we able to make use of the Indian philosophical and theological concepts without relativising the unique truth revealed in the person of Jesus. A purely Indian Christology is a myth in itself, as it ignores the Church of Christ, which is the living tradition of Christian faith. As Dupuis formulates it, “the Christ acknowledged by Hinduism is a Christ delivered from the encumbrances of numerous bonds with which he is laden by traditional Christianity.”⁴⁸ Hence there seems to appear a radical discontinuity between the traditional Christology and the Indian Christology.

The Indian way of thinking had inspired several dominant christologians of the west. For example, John Hick admits that his one year’s stay in India made copernican revolution in his thinking.⁴⁹ Joseph Ratzinger is of the opinion that the post-metaphysical theology of Europe, converges in a remarkable way with the negative theology of Asia, especially of India. He argues,

The a-religious and pragmatic relativism of Europe and America can borrow a kind of consecration from India, which seems to give its renunciation of dogma the dignity of a heightened reverence for the history of God and of man. Conversely, the way the European and American thinking has turned back to India’s philosophical and theological vision has the effect of further strengthening that relativizing of all religious figures which is part of India’s heritage.⁵⁰

As Cardinal Ratzinger had observed any responsible theologian can ever ignore the danger of relativism reflected in the above mentioned approaches. We need to stand in perceptible continuity with the ancient ecumenical councils. Christ is not the maturation of the human spirit or the mirror of a transcendent ideal, or the flower of humanity, but the incarnation of the preexistent Word of God, the second person of the Trinity: in Christ we encounter the very God himself.

The biblical revelation regarding Christ cannot be negated at any cost. As Emil Brunner aptly called *the scandal of particularity* - the inexplicable fact that God revealed himself among one particular people in history, the Jews, that God became man at one point in history, and that his revelation in this people and in this person is definitive and final. God revealed himself once for all in this particular event or events. The uniqueness of Christianity lies in its willingness to be continually purified and reformed in the light of the one great revelation of God in Jesus Christ, which cannot be duplicated but only heralded and obeyed. It cannot be simply nullified by means of using certain loan words from various cultures.

Karl Barth has been helpful in his conception of “little lights” and “other true words” that the Christian is able to discern in nature and in other religions by virtue of the one great light of Christ that makes these lesser lights and words intelligible and credible. In his later writings Barth alluded to a third circle of witnesses outside the Bible and the Church that magnify the name of Christ and testify to his goodness. But only people of faith by virtue of the opening of their eyes to the revelation of the glory of God in Jesus Christ can validly assess these other words and lights, which always constitute something alien and discordant in the systems and credos of the world of unbelief. I fully agree with Gregory of Nyssa that “we cannot see God in nature, but we can try to see nature in God.”

Finality of Revelation Versus Plurality of Revelation

In the first part of *DI*, it observes a perceived tendency on the part of some unnamed Catholic theologians to argue that “all religions may be equally valid ways of salvation.” Among other things, those theories question “the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus. Some theologians are trying to deny the finality of divine

revelation in the person of Jesus in terms of the ineffability, hiddenness, and limitlessness of God. According to these theologians, “the fullness of the Trinity is not incarnate in Jesus. Consequently, there is more to God, so to speak, than has been shown in Jesus Christ. God remains a *Deus absconditus*...”⁵¹

Dominus Iesus opposes this relativistic mentality, which is becoming ever more common, it is necessary above all to reassert the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ. It must be *firmly believed* that, in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6), the full revelation of divine truth is given. DV also states this fact unambiguously: “By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation”. It is only by affirming the finality of Revelation in Jesus Christ the Church can affirm its mission of evangelization. As the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* calls for: “In this definitive Word of his revelation, God has made himself known in the fullest possible way. He has revealed to mankind who he is. This definitive self-revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel, that is, the fullness of the truth which God has enabled us to know about himself”.

The distinction made by *Dominus Iesus* between *theological faith* and *belief* in the other religions cannot be overlooked rather it must be borne in mind in current theological reflection. Faith is the acceptance in grace of revealed truth, which makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently. Belief, in the other religions, is that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute (*DI*, 7).

It is the finality of revelation in Christ Jesus that makes the inspired value of the sacred Scripture significant. Even though the sacred books of other religions contain elements which may be *de facto* instruments by which countless people throughout the centuries have been and still are able today to nourish and maintain their life-relationship with God., the Church’s tradition, however, reserves the designation

of *inspired texts* to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, since these are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Gerald O'Collins, SJ, of the Gregorian University, has made this idea in a clearer perspective. In one sense, to be sure, Jesus Christ embodies and communicates the fullness of revelation, but in another sense he does not. The final vision of God is still to come, as we are reminded in 1 John 3:2 ("...what we shall be has not yet been revealed") and 1 Corinthians 13:12 ("At present we can see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face"). The problem arises only when we try to contradict between what is revealed and what is yet to be revealed.⁵²

The *DI* does not deny the significance of other religions. In fact it states the contrary. Bearing in mind the Catholic articles of faith, the documents invites the theologians to explore reflect on the existence of other religious experiences and on their meaning in God's salvific plan and they must be able to explain in what way the historical figures and positive elements of these religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation. In this undertaking, theological research has a vast field of work under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium. The Second Vatican Council, in fact, has stated that: "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a participation in this one source" (GS 10). The content of this participated mediation should be explored more deeply, but must remain always consistent with the principle of Christ's unique mediation: "Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his."⁵³ (DI, No. 14). As for God's acting salvifically outside the Church, O'Collins cites *Dominus Jesus* itself in acknowledging that God becomes present to people through the "spiritual riches" that their religions essentially embody and express (n. 8). The "elements of religiosity" found in the diverse "religious traditions" come "from God" (n. 21). Religious pluralism, therefore, does not simply exist *in fact*, as the declaration insists, but also *in principle*. We should realize the judicious distinction made by O'Collins regarding the various understandings of pluralism in principle. Accepting other religions are part of divine economy is radically different from arguing other religions as separate and equal paths of

salvation alongside with the Christ-event. O'Collins suggests, that we might all do well to abandon the language *of* pluralism altogether. He writes: "We are better off thinking in terms *of* the incredible love poured out on all humanity by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit".⁵⁴

Just as selective hermeneutics of the Bible is dangerous to its message, a selective reading of a magisterial teaching will not bring forth an integral vision of the Church. As Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini once observed no Catholic document should be read in isolation. For example, *Dominus Iesus* does not negate any of the teachings of either II Vatican council or other magisterial pronouncements. Cardinal Martini suggested that the document *Dominus Iesus* should be read in the light of "the wider and more encouraging framework" of the 1995 papal encyclical, *Ut unum sint*. In a similar tone, Cardinal Roger Mahony, then Archbishop of Los Angeles, observes that the fact that a particular document may not fully reflect the deeper understanding that has been achieved through ecumenical and interreligious dialogues over the past decades of the post Vatican era does not mean that the Church has gone back from all its previous positions. Certain documents are reactions to the counter culture and correctives to the erroneous teachings and they shall be interpreted within its context. Otherwise, we are likely to fall into the tendency and methodology adapted by the common media analysts who would focus on the plausible negatives with vested interests.⁵⁵

Person of Jesus versus Message of Jesus

It is a growing tendency among the theologians both in the East and West to give more importance to the message of Christ than to the person of Christ. In other words, they advocate a Christology that is centered on the kingdom of God preached by Christ rather than on the person of Christ. To mention an example from the West, this approach could be traced in the writings of Donald G. Dawe, whose basic tenets of Christology could be summarized into three main articles: (1) The name of Jesus is the encoding of the motif of death as resurrection as the key to the new being. This pattern is encountered in many religions. (2) The worship due to him is the willingness to accept dying to the self as the way to life. (3) The finality of Christ is in the unconditioned way in which he points beyond himself, even to the point of surrendering his selfhood, so that human kind may find healing in the unconditioned.⁵⁶

This view is shared also by many Christian and non-Christian theologians of India. For example, being a rationalist, Ram Mohan Roy did not accept the divinity of Jesus, though he was very much fascinated by the ethical teachings of Jesus, as having universal value and implications. He observes: “The consequence of my long and uninterrupted researches into religious Truth has been that I have found the doctrine of Christ more conducive to moral principles and better adapted for the use of rational beings than any others which have come to my knowledge.”⁵⁷ Jesus according to this view becomes one of the best paradigms to lead an ethically sound life.

Another typical representative of this group is Mahatma Gandhi. According to Gandhi truth (*sat*) is God. The only means to attain truth is non-violence (*ahimsa*) which cannot be attained without self-denial and self-control (*Brahmacharya*). For Gandhi, the central message of Jesus is the Sermon on the mount, which according to him is the manifesto of non-violence. The Christ-event was the acting out of the message of non-violence. He claims to be an ethical follower of Jesus. “Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus’ suffering is a factor in the composition of my underlying faith in non-violence, which rules all my actions, worldly and temporal. Jesus lived and died in vain, if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love.”⁵⁸ In the Gandhian approach, the message of Jesus surpasses the person of Jesus. Even if the Jesus of Nazareth had never lived in the history, “the sermon of the mount is still valid for me.”

These approaches often forget the reality that the person of Christ and his message cannot be separated. Church should witness to the truth of the Jesus Christ in the very midst of society in the hope and expectation that this truth will work as the leaven that turns society toward a higher degree of justice and freedom. The Church should serve the kingdom of righteousness by reminding the world that there is a transcendent order that stands in judgment over every worldly achievement and that the proper attitude of leaders of nations is one of humility before a holy God and caring concern for the disinherited and the oppressed.

The holy and living God of the Scriptures has acted decisively for the salvation of the human race through Jesus Christ. The hope of humanity rests on message of Jesus, that is, the kingdom of God,

which is now at work in our midst and will be consummated through the coming again of Jesus Christ in power and glory.

Ecclesiological Domain

The salvific role of the Church in the divine economy of salvation is another area of debate in the contemporary theology. It is true that the magisterium accepts the possibility of salvation outside the frontiers of the Church. Pius IX (*Quanto conficiamur moerore*, August 10, 1863) taught: “God... in His supreme goodness and clemency, by no means allows anyone to be punished with eternal punishments who does not have the guilt of voluntary fault.” Vatican II (*LG*, 16) taught the same: “They who without their own fault do not know of the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but yet seek God with sincere heart, and try, under the influence of grace, to carry out His will in practice, known to them through the dictate of conscience, can attain eternal salvation.” Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis Christi* pointed out that one can “be related to the Church by a certain desire and wish of which he is not aware”, i.e., by the desire to do what God wills in general. However, these teachings in no way can be interpreted to disprove the salvific significance of the Church in the divine economy of salvation.

Mission of Christ and the Mission of the Church

The theological ambiguity created by some ecclesiologists in separating the salvific mission of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church is another issue wrestled with in the contemporary dogmatics. Against the view that Christ can be separated from his Church, the Catholic faith categorically hold the view that there exists a historical continuity between Christ and the Church founded by Christ, that is, the Catholic Church. Jesus did not only establish a simple community of disciples, but constituted the Church as a *salvific mystery*: he himself is in the Church and the Church is in him (cf. *Jn* 15:1ff.; *Gal* 3:28; *Eph* 4:15-16; *Acts* 9:5). Therefore, the fullness of Christ’s salvific mystery belongs also to the Church, inseparably united to her Lord (*DI*, 16).

Some of the Indian ecclesiologists believe that within the specific socio-economic context of the country, where the vast majority of people are exploited and marginalized by a powerful minority, the Church has a specific mission to fight against the evil forces that prevent the establishment of the kingdom of God. Consequently, Church is believed to have the duty of engaging with every movement

that strives for social justice. Amalorpavadass criticizes the Indian church leaders for not engaging actively in these movements: “Often it [the Indian Church] was not only absent from them [the social movements for justice] but even undermined them by calling Christians away from the struggles in the name of peace.”⁵⁹ It is obvious that there is ample room for social intervention in Catholic ecclesiology as it encourages the faithful to situate dynamically against the oppressive forces and structures of evil. However, the ecclesiological tension occurs when the Church is understood only as an agent of social reformation. This is a kind of non-ecclesial Christology, because it pays no attention to the church in explaining and understanding the mystery of Christ. This approach at times even considers the Church as a barrier for understanding the mystery of Christ.

Christ and the Church can neither be confused nor separated, and constitute a single “whole Christ.” This same inseparability is also expressed in the New Testament by the analogy of the Church as the *Bride of Christ* (cf. *2 Cor* 11:2; *Eph* 5:25-29; *Rev* 21:2,9). Just as there is one Christ, so there exists a single body of Christ, a single Bride of Christ. The promises of the Lord that he would not abandon his Church (cf. *Mt* 16:18; 28:20) and that he would guide her by his Spirit (cf. *Jn* 16:13) mean, according to Catholic faith, the inseparability between Christ and his Church.

Kingdom of God and the Church

The modern theories, that tend to divorce radically between the kingdom of God and the Church are detrimental to Catholic faith. The modern views try to create an area outside of, and even independently of, the Church where God’s saving activity is at work on behalf of non-Christians. A typical representative of this view from the Indian subcontinent might be the “Christ-centred humanist approach”⁶⁰ suggested by M.M Thomas. Christ, according to Thomas, is a great social liberator which is visualized in his teachings on the kingdom of God. The title of his main work “*Salvation and Humanization*”⁶¹ sheds light on the nature of his Christology. The fundamental premise of Thomas’s Christology is that, because Christ is the principle and goal of creation, every attempt for the betterment of any creation is related to Christ. What Jesus has done and taught towards the establishment of the kingdom, according to him, is more significant than who Jesus is.

The mission of the Church is “to proclaim and establish among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom.” Separating between Christ, Kingdom and Church will give rise to the following theological lacunas:

1. Church being the “people gathered by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is “the kingdom of Christ already present in mystery”⁷¹ and constitutes its *seed* and *beginning* (DI, 18).

2. The kingdom of God which we know from revelation, “cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church... If the kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the kingdom of God which he revealed. The Kingdom separated from Christ and the Church would become a purely human or ideological goal and a distortion of the identity of Christ, who no longer appears as the Lord to whom everything must one day be subjected (cf. *1 Cor* 15:27).

3. Extreme approaches of one-sided accentuations, such as separation between the Kingdom and the Church as well as the radical identification of Church with the Kingdom of God, are equally misleading. To state the inseparable relationship between Christ and the kingdom is not to overlook the fact that the kingdom of God - even if considered in its historical phase - is not identified with the Church in her visible and social reality.

4. The so-called ‘kingdom centred’ theologians ignores not only the Church but also the Christ-event. The kingdom of which they speak is ‘theocentrically’ based as different peoples, cultures, and religions are capable of finding common ground in the one divine reality, by whatever name it is called.

5. The so-called ‘kingdom centred’ theologians put great stress on the mystery of creation, which is reflected in the diversity of cultures and beliefs, but they keep silent about the mystery of redemption and undervalues role of the Church. They are tempted to deny the unicity of the relationship which Christ and the Church have with the kingdom of God.

Sacraments and Other Religious Rituals

Equating the sacraments of the Church with the religious rituals of the non-Christian religions is another area of discontentment observed in the contemporary magisterial documents. It would be contrary to

the Catholic faith to consider the Church as a way of salvation alongside those constituted by other religions. The sacraments are the living continuation of the paschal mystery of Christ. The effectiveness of Christ's continuing work in his Church cannot be dependent on man's inadequacy. A sacrament, administered properly in the way established by Christ and with the proper intention, gives the grace it signifies. It is effective not by reason of the power of intercession neither of priestly prayer nor on account of the worthiness of the recipient, but solely by the power of Christ. The power of Christ lives in the sacraments. The effect of the sacrament is independent of the sinfulness or unworthiness of the minister. The Church has never tolerated any subjective qualification of the objective effectiveness of the sacraments *ex opere operato*. This would ultimately be to conceive the way of salvation as being man's way to God and not God's way to man. Therefore, any theology that advocates parity of sacraments with no-Christian religious rituals must be handled with utmost care. *Dominus Isus* makes the following theological observations on this issue:

1. The Church is the "universal sacrament of salvation", since, united always in a mysterious way to the Saviour Jesus Christ, her Head, and subordinated to him, she has, in God's plan, an indispensable relationship with the salvation of every human being. Sacraments are the most effective and direct means of this salvific grace.

2. Certainly, the various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God, and which are part of what "the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures, and religions".

3. Indeed, some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel, in that they are occasions or pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prompted to be open to the action of God.

4. One cannot attribute to these, however, a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments.

5. Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors, constitute an obstacle to salvation.

6. Church is primarily committed to proclaiming to all people the truth definitively revealed by the Lord, and to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through Baptism and the other sacraments, in order to participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Universal Salvation Versus Necessity of Baptism

The Catholic doctrine makes a clear distinction between those who are baptised and those who are not. The relationship between the Church and the so-called invisible members of the Church is a subtle theological issue. DI clearly teaches that, “For those who are not formally and visibly members of the Church, salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church” (DI, 21). The formal relationship with the Church is possible only by means of Baptism. Regarding the salvation of the non-baptised the Second Vatican Council limited itself to the statement that God bestows it “in ways known to himself”. However, from what has been stated above it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as *one way* of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions. With the coming of the Saviour Jesus Christ, God has willed that the Church founded by him be the instrument for the salvation of all humanity (cf. *Acts* 17:30-31). Therefore the mentality of indifferentism “characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that ‘one religion is as good as another’ must be ruled out.

Dominus Iesus clearly states that, “If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation” (DI, 22). However, the exalted condition of the baptised results, not from their own merits, but from the grace of Christ. If they fail to respond in thought, word, and deed to that grace, not only shall they not be saved, but they shall be more severely judged. The baptism does not impart a sense of superiority over other religions rather a sense greater responsibility to the divine economy of salvation.

The Catholic faith affirms that those who obey the promptings of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation. The Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must dedicate herself for evangelisation. The mission of the Church shall not be restricted to

Inter-religious dialogue. Inter-religious dialogue is to be understood as part of her evangelizing mission *ad gentes*. The sense of equality, which is a presupposition of inter-religious dialogue, refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ in relation to the founders of the other religions. The mission of the Church is announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through Baptism and the other sacraments, in order to participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The problem of theological authority has become especially acute, since it would seem that cultural experience is supplanting the biblical witness as the ruling criterion for faith and practice. Instead of depending on the sacramental grace, a neo-Gnosticism is emerging that locates truth in the alteration of consciousness rather than in an event in sacred history. The philosopher Schopenhauer (d. 1860), has declared that we are justified neither by faith nor by works but by knowledge. Tillich's contention that self-discovery is God-discovery betrays a sort of Gnostic mentality we see increasingly gaining acceptance.

Catholic Church and Churches

The salvific significance of the Catholic Church is another area of dispute in the current theological disputes. Many Catholic theologians were opposing the ecclesial vision of *Dominus Iesus*.⁶² According to them *Dominus Iesus* proclaims that "the Church of Christ... continues to exist only in the Catholic Church". In fact they had misread the document. *Dominus Iesus* does *not* say that the Church of Christ continues to exist "only" in the Catholic Church; it says that it is only in the Catholic Church that it continues to exist "fully." The text reads as follows:

Therefore, there exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him. The Churches which, while not existing in perfect communion with the Catholic Church, remain united to her by means of the closest bonds, that is, by apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist, are true particular Churches. Therefore, the Church of Christ is present and operative also in these Churches,

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even though they lack full communion with the Catholic Church, since they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Primacy, which, according to the will of God, the Bishop of Rome objectively has and exercises over the entire Church (DI, 16).

The document directly follows the teachings of the council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 8, that the one Church of Christ "subsists in" in the Catholic Church. Whatever "efficacy" non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities may have is derived "from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church" (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 3). According to the declaration, to be regarded as a church "in the proper sense" rather than as an ecclesial community, a non-Catholic body must possess a "valid episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the eucharistic mystery". Such churches are "in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Catholic Church".

As Francis Sullivan, SJ, of the Gregorian University and of Boston College, pointed out, "The difference between those statements is the difference between the doctrine of Pius XII and that of Vatican II." It was the teaching of Pius XII, in his encyclicals *Mystici corporis* and *Humani generis*, that the Catholic Church and the Mystical Body of Christ are "one and the same" ("*unum idemque esse*"). This exclusive identification was still being asserted in the first two drafts of the council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*: "The Church of Christ is the Catholic Church". But the council replaced the copulative verb "is" with the ecclesiological and ecumenically broader "subsists in" (n. 8). Aloys Grillmeier, a member of the council's Theological Commission and subsequently named a cardinal by Pope John Paul II, wrote in his commentary on the text: "This means that the Roman Church, as a local church, is only part of the whole Church, though its bishop is head of all the bishops of the Catholic Church". According to Grillmeier, "'ecclesiality' does not simply coincide with the Catholic Church, because ecclesial elements of sanctification and truth can be found outside it."

Richard P. McBrien, rightly in my opinion, argues that in changing the verb from "*est*" to "*subsistit in*" the council fathers clearly intended to include non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities in the one, albeit divided, Body of Christ. Otherwise, they would have left

the teaching of Pius XII in place and held to the verb “*est*.” Retaining the verb *subsistit* in the document of the CDF cannot be blamed for going against the Spirit of ecumenism. The CDF had made this stance clearer in its *Notificatio*, concerning Leonardo Boff’s book, *Church: Charism and Power*, insisting that the reason for the change of verbs in article 8 was to emphasize that there is “only one ‘subsistence’ of the true Church, while outside of her visible structure there only exist *elementa Ecclesiae*, which-being elements of that same Church-tend and lead toward the Catholic Church”.

Cardinal Willebrands argues this point more succinctly from a Christological point of view. According to him, the change from “*est*” to “*subsistit in*” was not only ecclesiological, but also Christological - the one inseparable from the other. The two come together in an ecclesiology of communion. He is of the opinion that, “if the Church is fundamentally this communion with the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, we can see that on the one hand the depth of this communion determines the depth of incorporation in the Church, and on the other that it cannot be a question of all or nothing... *Subsistit in* thus appears, in an ecclesiology of communion, as an attempt to express the transcendence of grace and to give an inkling of the breadth of divine benevolence”

Moreover, the term “church” does not apply only to those Christian communities with an episcopate and a Eucharist deemed “valid” by the Catholic Church. The ultimate bases for communion with the one Church of Christ are faith and baptism. In the words of the Decree on Ecumenism: “For those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church” (n. 3). *Dominus Jesus* also recognizes in principle that there are non-Catholic churches in imperfect communion with the Catholic Church. As McBrien observes, what *Dominus Jesus* does not explicitly say is that the communion of these other churches is not simply with the Catholic Church but with the Church of Christ as a whole, in which the Catholic Church alone is “fully” incorporated.

The strong and widespread negative reactions to the document of *Dominus Iesus* made the Holy Father himself to respond to them. I prefer to conclude this presentation with the observations made by Pope John Paul II on the document during the midday *Angelus* blessing

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on October 1: The declaration (*DI*) “does not deny salvation to non-Christians but points to its ultimate source in Christ, in whom man and God are united.” He said that “God gives light to all in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation, granting them salvific grace in ways known to himself.” Moreover, the Holy Father continued, “if the document, together with the Second Vatican Council, declares that ‘the single Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church’, it does not intend thereby to express scant regard for the other churches and ecclesial communities”. On the contrary, “the Catholic Church... suffers from the fact that true particular churches and ecclesial communities with precious elements of salvation are separated from her. The document thus expresses once again the same ecumenical passion that is the basis of my encyclical *Ut unum sint*. I hope that this declaration, which is close to my heart, can, after so many erroneous interpretations, finally fulfill its function both of clarification and of openness.” As the document itself envisions: The Christian mystery, in fact, overcomes all barriers of time and space, and accomplishes the unity of the human family.

Footnotes

- 1 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion* trans. John Oman (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), p. 175.
- 2 For a detailed analysis see, Donald G. Bloesch, “The Finality of Christ and Religious Pluralism,” p. 6.
- 3 For a critical analysis see Leslie Newbigin, “Religious Pluralism and the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ” in J. I. Packer, ed. *The Best in Theology* (Carol Stream, IL: *Christianity Today*, 1990) (267–274), p. 269.
- 4 Hans Küng, “The World Religions in God’s Plan of Salvation,” in Joseph Neuner, ed. *Christian Revelation and World Religions* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967) (pp. 25–66), p. 52.
- 5 John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 88.
- 6 Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience*, p. 21.
- 7 Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ in Hinduism*, p. 28.
- 8 Raimundo Panikkar, *Christ’s Name in the Economy of Salvation*, p. 214.
- 9 Stanley Samartha, “The Cross and the Rainbow,” John Hick and Paul Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (New York: Orbis, 1987) 69–88, p. 77.

- 10 Hans Kung, *Restitution of the True Doctrine of God and Christ*, 23.
- 11 Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, p. 531
- 12 JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 6.
- 13 Cf. ST. LEO THE GREAT, *Tomus ad Flavianum: DS* 294.
- 14 W. KASPER, "Relating Christ's Universality to Interreligious Dialogue", *Origins* 30, 21 (2 November, 2000) 325, 326, 327.
- 15 Stanley Samartha, "The Cross and the Rainbow," p. 76.
- 16 Terrence Merrigan "Religious Knowledge in the Pluralist Theology of Religions," p. 687. He refers to L. Gilkey as an example of this position: Langdon Gilkey, "Plurality and its Theological Implications," in John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988) p. 37.
- 17 Terrence Merrigan, "Religious Knowledge in the Pluralist Theology of Religions," p. 687.
- 18 Terrence Merrigan, "The Historical Jesus in the pluralist Theology of Religions," p. 65.
- 19 Maurice Wiles, "In What Sense is Christianity a 'Historical Religion?,'" *Theology* 81 (1978) p. 12.
- 20 Terrence Merrigan, "The Historical Jesus in the pluralist Theology of Religions," p. 67-68.
- 21 Arul Pragasam, "The God of Religious Pluralism and christology," T. Merrigan and J. Haers (eds.), *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology*. Leuven: University Press, 2000, p. 547.
- 22 Arul Pragasam, "The God of Religious Pluralism and christology," p. 547.
- 23 Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000) p. 22
- 24 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Centrality of Jesus for History*, in Michael Goulder (ed.), *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued* (London: SCM Press, 1979) p. 197.
- 25 Karl Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens*, p. 175. See also Joseph Pandiappallil, *Jesus the Christ and Religious Pluralism*, pp. 76-77.
- 26 Philip Endean, "Rahner, Christology and Grace," *Heythrop Journal* 37 (1996) 284-297, p. 285. See also, Jerry Farmer, "Four Christological Themes of the Theology of Karl Rahner," T. Merrigan and J. Haers (eds.), *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology*. Leuven: University Press, 2000, p. 433.
- 27 Terrence Merrigan, "Jacques Dupuis and the Redefinition of Inclusivism," in Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins, (eds.), *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 2003) p. 62.
- 28 Veli-Matti Kärkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002) p.

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116. See also Veli-Matti Kärkainen, *Christology a Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003) pp. 140-146.
- 29 Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations* 5 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966) pp. 128-129.
- 30 Karl Rahner, "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, 17 (New York: Crossroad, 1981) p. 43. See also Veli-Matti Kärkainen, *Christology a Global Introduction*, p. 145.
- 31 Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997) p. 146.
- 32 Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," in *Theological Investigations*, 6 (Baltimore, MD.: Helicon, 1969) p. 394.
- 33 Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church," *Theological Investigations* 12 (New York: Seabury Press, 1974) p. 166.
- 34 For details, see Michael Maladoss, "Is Christ the Unique Saviour? A Clarification of the Question," Eroll D'Lima, Max Gonsalves (eds.) *What Does Jesus Christ Mean* (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2001) 7-20.
- 35 M.M. Thomas, "....." *Religion and Society* 12, no. 3 (1965), p. 67.
- 36 This title is common in the Christological reflections of P. Chenchaiiah (1886-1959). For details, see Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theologies from an Indian Perspective* (Bangalore: TBT, 1995) p. 122.
- 37 This Christological title is used by Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973). See Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 78.
- 38 See Brahmabandhav Animananda, *The Blade, Life and Works of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya*, Culcutta, 1946, p. 68.
- 39 Roberto de Nobili was an Italian Jesuit missionary who arrived in Indian in 1605. He studied the Hindu scriptures and the indigenous languages. Among his writings, the most significant one is the five volume book *Jnanopadesakam* (*wise advices*) written in Tamil. This is an interpretation of the teachings of Christ using the indigenous terminologies.
- 40 See Kavumkal, "Indian Views on the Significance of Jesus Christ," p. 53.
- 41 Kavumkal, "Indian Views on the Significance of Jesus Christ," p. 53.
- 42 As cited in Mathias Mundadan, *Emergence of the Catholic Theological Consciousness* (Alwaye: St. Thomas Academy for Research, 1985) p. 5.
- 43 For a critical analysis of Sen's Christology, see Parappally, *Emerging Trends*, pp. 9-17.
- 44 *Complete Works*, vol. VII, p. 1. Commenting on this quote, Amaladoss, *Asian Jesus*,
- 45 B. Upadhyaya, "Incarnate Logos" *Twentieth Century* (1901) p. 7.
- 46 John N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (New Delhi: Oriental Books, 1913, repr. 1971).

- 47 Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 122.
- 48 Jaques Dupuis, *Jesus Christ as the Encounter of World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) p. 15.
- 49 Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), p. 119.
- 50 Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 122.
- 51 Paul Wilkes, "Only Catholics Need Apply," Sunday edition of *The Boston Globe* (9/10/00) p. 11.
- 52 Gerard O'Collins, "Watch Your Language" (review of Gavin Costa's *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*), *The Tablet* (November 4, 2000) 1490.
- 53 *Redemptoris Missio* No. 5
- 54 Collins, *watch Your Language*, 149.
- 55 Roger Cardinal Mahony, "Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue Will Continue", *The Tidings* (15 September, 2000).
- 56 Donald G. Dowe, "Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World," Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman (eds.), *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), 13-32. For the above abstract and evaluation of this study, see Seshairi Rao, "The Value of Religious Pluralism," p. 54
- 57 Quoted in M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Ct of the Indian Renaissance* (Madras: Christ Literature Society, 1970) p. 9 and in Amaladoss, *The Asian Jesus*, 27.
- 58 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Message of Jesus ct* (Bombay: 1940), p. 35, cited in Amaladoss, *Asian Jesus*, p. 30.
- 59 Amalorpavadass, *Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, p. 75.
- 60 M. M. Thomas, "A Christ-Centered Humanist Approach to Other Religions in the Indian Pluralistic Context," Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Myth of Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (Marknoll, NY: 2003) 49-63.
- 61 M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization* (Madras: Christian Institute, 1971).
- 62 Paul Wilkes, in *The Boston Globe*.

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