The Hesitant Pilgrim: Catholic Biblical Scholarship Approaching the 25th Anniversary of Vatican II

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Introduction

I begin with two images. At the Second Vatican Council the Bishops processed into St. Peter's basilica behind an ancient manuscript of the Scriptures and conducted their deliberations before it enshrined in a place of honor. When Pope Paul VI, the pope of the final three sessions of the Council, died in 1978 an open book of the Gospels was placed on his coffin and when it was lowered into the earth its pages were turned by the winds.[1]

The pilgrimage of biblical studies within Roman Catholicism from a marginal role with a defensive posture toward emerging historical critical methods, to its flowering after Vatican II, when it joined the mainstream of biblical studies, did not begin with Vatican II.[2] It is a long pilgrimage of faith and intellect, but a human story peopled with characters often as colorful as those whom Chaucer followed on the way to Canterbury. Preening prelates, and hollow-eyed scholars, roguish monks and good women, all would have their tales to tell if time and history allowed. This pilgrimage began with sporadic attempts to meet the chal-

lenge of modernity by courageous scholars like Richard Simon in the 17th century and the members of the Catholic Tübingen school in 19th century. It gained momentum with the cautious opening toward critical methods in the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, Providentissimus Deus issued on Nov. 18, 1893. The years immediately following his encyclical witnessed the beginning of modern Catholic biblical scholarship at the recently founded Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem (1890) and at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome (1909).

The first seedlings of emerging biblical scholarship, however, soon fell on the rocky ground of the anti-modernist reaction, amid attempts of Roman integrists to tar biblical scholars with the brush of Modernism. The early decrees issued by the Biblical Commission (1905-15) mandated for Catholic scholars the most traditional position on virtually every issue raised by critical scholarship.[3] The anti-modernist reaction was especially destructive of Catholic biblical scholarship in the United States, still in its infancy in the first decades of the 20th century. In his recent history of American Catholic biblical scholarship Gerald Fogarty describes its long term effects as follows:

> The state of Catholic biblical scholarship in the United States at the end of the 1930's was bleak. Whatever scholarship there had been at the beginning of the century had either been destroyed or gone underground....The type of Neo-

> Thomism, formulated in the nineteenth century to combat rationalism, had become so pervasive that Catholic writers confused rationalism with doctrine. Jesuit professors like Peirce and Gruenthaner took as their starting point, not the criticism of texts, but the declarations of the popes or the biblical Commission. . . In effect, integrism had become a habit of mind, even after Benedict XV had condemned it. The American church gave little indication that it was ready to undertake any type of scholarly endeavor.[4]

Though our pilgrim seemed to be in long hibernation, her journey was surprisingly renewed at the end of the 1930's by the founding of the Catholic Biblical Association, which grew out of the need to provide a new translation of the scriptures to supplant the older Douay-Rheims version. More significantly, amid the darkest days of World War II, the dedication and patience of biblical scholars such as Lagrange and Bea bore fruit in the encyclical, Divino Afflante Spiritu, issued by Pius XII, on 30th of September 1943 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Leo XIII's encyclical.[5] Here Pius rejects those Catholic conservatives who ". . .pretend that nothing remains to be added by the Catholic exegete of our time to what Christianity has brought to light."[6] The letter also approved critical methods urging that exegetes "endeavor to determine the peculiar character and cir-

cumstances of the sacred writer, the age in which he lived, the sources written or oral to which he had recourse and the forms of expression he employed."[7] Exegesis of the text was to be determined by the literal (or literary sense) defined as "the literal meaning of the words, intended and expressed by the sacred writer" and while exegetes were also exhorted "to disclose and expound the spiritual significance intended and ordained by God, they should scrupulously refrain from proposing as the genuine meaning of Scripture other figurative senses".[8]

Divino Afflante Spiritu contributed to the acceleration of biblical studies in the United States, especially in the 50's, which witnessed a changing of the guard as younger scholars were prepared for biblical studies at institutions such as Johns Hopkins.[9] Still, the progress of biblical studies was far from smooth. Biblical scholars continued to be attacked by conservatives in the United States, encouraged and supported by the heirs of integrism in Rome. For example, Edward F. Siegmann who, as editor from 1951-58 transformed the Catholic Biblical Quarterly into a solid scholarly journal, was constantly attacked by integrists, leading to his dismissal from Catholic University in 1961 on purported grounds of ill health. At the beginning of the pontificate of John XXIII (1958) important biblical scholars were attacked, culminating in the removal of Stanislas Lyonnet and Maximilian Zerwick from their teaching positions on the eve of the Second Vatican Council.[10] When John XXIII shocked the

world on Jan. 25, 1959 by announcing that he intended to call an ecumenical council, the theological atmosphere did not bode well for the future of biblical studies. Yet it was to be the dogmatic constitution on revelation Dei Verbum in the context of the general renewal of church life and theology accomplished in Vatican II which spawned a full flowering of Catholic biblical studies.

As we approach the 25th anniversary of this decree, my purpose tonight is (I) to describe briefly the journey of the document from its preconciliar status to its final approval, with attention to the hermeneutical principles within the document, (II) to sketch certain movements and tensions as Catholic biblical scholarship joined the mainstream of biblical scholarship in the decades following the council, with special attention to the present situation and (III) to offer a "modest proposal" on one direction biblical scholarship might take to meet the challenges of the present situation.

Part I: The Journey of a Document

On June 18 1959, under the direction of Cardinal Tardini, the Secretary of States, invitations were issued world-wide to bishops, other church officials and theological faculties to make recommendations on the council.[11] By May 1960 over 2000 responses were gathered. On June 5, 1960, two years before the Council was to begin. Pope John XXIII set up a central

preparatory commission, ten subcommissions and two Secretariats.[12] The president of the important theological commission was Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, the prefect of the Holy Office, known for his rigorous conservatism. A month later on July 5, 1960, Pope John charged this commission to deal with "Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition."[13]

During the summer of 1960 a summary was prepared of 13 points which was sent to the members of the commission on October 27, 1960. A subcommission was then formed to develop these original 13 points into a Draft or Schema which was eventually discussed by the central preparatory commission on Nov. 10, 1961.[14] Though substantial objections were voiced against this schema by Cardinals, Frings, Koenig, Döpfner, and Bea, these were seen as merely advisory by Cardinal Ottaviani.[15] With small changes this was the document sent to the Council participants in the Summer of 1962 and presented at the first session of the Vatican Council under the title, A Dogmatic Schema on the Sources of Revelation.[16]

This schema crystallized the reactionary tendencies of post-Tridentine and anti-modernist theology. It also rarely refers to Divino Afflante Spiritu and never cites those passages where Pius XII explicitly authorized use of modern methods of criticism. Going beyond what was stated at Trent this schema says explicitly that there are two sources of revelation.[17] The schema also states "it is completely forbidden to admit that the sacred

author could have erred, since divine inspiration of its very nature precludes and rejects all error in every thing, both religious and profane.[18]

In contrast to the desire of John XXIII that the forthcoming Council be pastoral and avoid the language of condemnation the schema "condemns those errors" by which it is asserted that the Evangelists or **what is far worse** [emphasis mine] the primitive communities" altered sayings of the historical Jesus or attributed to him words which he did not utter.[19] Behind this condemnation is a rejection of form and redaction criticism which were emerging as the dominant methods of New Testament studies.

When this draft was presented during the first session of the Council on Nov. 14, 1962, like the barons who rose up against King John in 1215, a procession of red robed speakers stood to urge rejection of this schema, led off by Cardinal Achille Lienhart's ringing "Hoc schema mihi non placet."[20] As Joseph Ratzinger comments: "the inevitable storm broke which had been building up in a private counterdraft, circularized by the presidents of the bishops' conferences of Belgium, Germany, France, Holland and Austria."[21] Bishop Emile DeSmedt of Bruges Belgium offered a crucial intervention, noting that the Theological Commission had not consulted the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity as the Pope had advised, with the result that "The schema is a step backwards, a hindrance, it does damage. The publication of the theological schema in the form of the drafts we

had before us would destroy all the hope that the Council could lead to the drawing together again of the separated brethren."[22]

It was during this debate that the bishops of the world asserted that the Council was to represent the church universal and not the anti-modernist theology of the Roman Curia. Guiseppe Alberigo, one of the leading interpreters of Vatican II, notes: "Had the conciliars father done nothing else, that action alone would have been credited to Vatican II--and John XXIII--as a meritorious deed of the first importance: a refusal to succumb to an oligarchy, and the restoration of full freedom in the Church."[23] Nonetheless, despite strong voices against this draft, partly because of parliamentary confusion, the vote to reject the schema did not receive the required two-thirds majority necessary to send it back to the drafting committee. The drama of this first session was further heightened when on the morning of Nov. 21 Cardinal Felici, the General Secretary of the Council announced that the Pope had removed discussion of this schema from the agenda and handed it over to a mixed commission of which Cardinals Ottaviani and Bea, representing the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity were to be co-chairs.

Later on the same day, Nov. 21, there occured one of the most extraordinary doctoral defenses in history. At the Pontifical Biblical Institute a young German Scripture scholar, Norbert Lohfink defended his thesis on Deuteronomy with an unprecedented

number of auditors, 12 Cardinals, 150 bishops, innumerable council periti, seminarians, visitors, Oscar Cullmann, one of the distinguished Protestant observers, and the German ambassador. They were there to signify their elation at the new turn of events and to protest the attitude of the Holy Office to the Biblical Insitute and modern biblical studies.[24]

The decree on Revelation would not again be discussed until the third session of the Council (Sept. 30th to October 6th, 1964) and would then go through three major revisions before its final adoption on Nov. 18, 1965. Though it was not a decree on Scripture but on revelation, its new understanding of revelation would shape both exegesis and theology. In place of a neo-Scholastic emphasis on revelation as revealed truth which transcends human reason, revelation is dialogic and personal. While Vatican I says that God reveals his wisdom, goodness and "eternal decrees of his will," Vatican II uses less abstract language in stating "God chose to reveal himself" (art. 2). Revelation as personal communication in word and deed is thus wider than the record of it in the Bible. If revelation is primarily the self-disclosure of God in Israel's history and in the Christ event, then tradition cannot simply be the handing on of a series of doctrines or practices contained in the unwritten traditions of the church. Tradition is the ongoing witness to the Christ-event expressed in language and other aspects of church life.

On important issues of biblical interpretation Dei Verbum remains dialectical reflecting its origin as a document combining

traditional perspectives with cautious openings to more progressive thought. It states simultaneously that the "Magisterium," the teaching office, is not above the word of God, but serves and continues, "the task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office (Magisterium) of the church" (art. 10). Thus the teaching office is simultaneously the servant of the word and its authentic interpreter; the whole Church determines the development of tradition, but is subordinate to the teaching authority.[25]

Chapter Three of this decree, "The Divine Inspiration and Interpretation of Sacred Scripture," was of most interest to biblical scholars. After describing inerrancy in article 11 in one of the most debated sentences of the Council as extending to "that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation," article 12 turns to biblical interpretation. The principal norm of interpretation is that "the interpreter of sacred Scripture in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writer really intended and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words." (art. 12) Selective methodological principles are then given to attain the original sense of the text: (1) attention must be paid to the literary forms; (2) the interpreter must consider the historical circumstances of the time of writing, and (3) attention must be paid to "the cus-

tomary and characteristic patters which people in that period employed in dealing with each other. In principal no method of scholarly inquiry is precluded in seeking the meaning of texts.

The Council then turns to theological exegesis, introduced by a citation from St. Jerome that "the holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written." (Dei Verbum 12).[26] This "pneumatic" or spiritual exegesis means consequently that "serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture;" interpretation must take into account "the living tradition of the whole church along with the analogy of faith (analogia fidei)." This final recommendation recalls the earlier statement from paragraph 8 of Dei Verbum that "the tradition which comes form the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit," in a number of ways, by growth in understanding (perceptio) of the realities and words handed down; through contemplation and study of believers (contemplatione et studio), through the intimate understanding of the spiritual realities they experience, and through the preaching (praeconio, also translated as proclamation) of those who through episcopal succession have received the sure charism of truth. Historical exegesis, the work of scholars, the experience of believers, the prayer of the church as well as preaching by church leaders all contribute to understanding the mystery of the Word.

From a perspective of 25 years, while we can appreciate the achievements of the Decree on Revelation both, its own condition-

ing by history and its unresolved theological tensions begin to emerge. These tensions have provided recently a "conflict of interpretations" about the Council. Since the Council documents present an admitted mixture of traditional pre-conciliar theology and perspectives open to future development, both conservatives and liberals tend to "proof text" from the Council in favor of their positions.

While I cannot treat adequately the difficult issue of conciliar "reception" or how council documents are rightly interpreted, I will offer a few suggestions. **First,** Vatican II is not simply a collection of documents. It is a process begun in the preparatory stages of the Council worked out dramatically in the Council sessions, but continued in the ongoing history of the church. In this arena history is hermeneutics. To see either the Scriptural hermeneutics fostered or employed by the Council as the last word would be unfaithful to the council's own recognition of the pilgrim nature of the church and the need for development of doctrine. **Secondly**, the Council intentionally left certain disputed issues open, among which were, for example, the nature of inspiration and the relation of historical criticism to theological interpretation.[27] **Thirdly,** since the Council was a historical event its documents should be interpreted by the same rules the Council chose to apply to scripture. Specifically the historical circumstances and mode of thinking of the participants should be evaluated. Concretely this means that in order to keep

alive what my colleague Don Gelpi calls "the subversive memory of Vatican II," interpreters must engage in a careful reading of the Acta of the Council (over 50 large volumes in Latin) retracing the various redactions of the documents. Such retracing can show how these documents moved often painfully to more ecumenical and open positions in face of a well-organized traditionalist minority whose views, however, still influence the final texts. Interpretation of specific documents must be based on their internal dynamics towards openness rather than be limited by their textual dialectic of conservative and open positions.[28]

The history of Catholic biblical scholarship since Vatican II, though not consciously planned as such, presents a sequential grappling with the Council's promotion of historical criticism and its simultaneous caution that this is not totally adequate for Christian faith but must be joined to theological interpretation. Until the mid 70's issues of historical criticism dominated, followed by issues of theological hermeneutics which are most alive today. I now turn to an admittedly inadequate survey of the post-conciliar development.

II. Sketches of the Post-Conciliar Development

The immediate history of post-Vatican Catholic biblical scholarship, in concert with other theological disciplines presents a dazzling kaleidoscope. One immediate effect was the com-

mitment to biblical and theological studies by a great number of people. More and more talented lay people, especially women scholars entered the field, so that when the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II is celebrated the clerical biblical scholar will be as rare as the lay scholar was in the 1950's. The locus of theological education shifted. Like Jerome's comment that "the whole world groaned and marveled to find itself Arian,"[29] traditional non-Catholic institutions began to realize in the late 60's and early 70's that their worlds groaned Rahner or Lonergan. The biblical renewal became the soul of bilateral ecumenical dialogs, as groups turned to the Scriptural roots of disputed issues only to find that a historical critical reading of the Scriptures challenged positions once thought to be set in concrete.[30] Theologians such as Küng, Schillebeeckx and Kaspar all wrote significant studies of Jesus solidly informed by biblical scholarship. Redaction criticism helped to recognize the theological creativity and literary achievement of the Evangelists and disclosed a multi-colored pluralism in the NT itself. Fresh translations such as the Bible of Jerusalem and the New American Bible were produced and Catholics participated in the production of commentaries no longer divided along confessional lines. Creative theological movements such as feminist and liberation theology wrestled critically with the biblical texts as a source of their insights. Literally thousands of religious and lay people flocked to summer institutes and workshops

sustained by joyful discovery of the manner in which the bible touched their lives.

Always lurking in the background was the major unresolved issue of relating historical criticism to theological interpretation. (Though not a formal Protestant observer, the uninvited guest at Vatican II was Ernst Troeltsch.)

The unfolding debate on this issue has been admirably and meticulously surveyed by Terrence Curran in a recently completed dissertation from the Gregorian University in Rome (1987), Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation Interpretation of Scripture.[31] From the period shortly before the Council until 1983 Curran presents a comprehensive survey country by country of the emerging concern for the integration of theological interpretation and historical critical exegesis.

This concern evolved differently in various countries.[32] Curran notes that in the United States major achievements were made in the use of the historical criticism by scholars such as Raymond Brown and in its defense in the face of right wing attacks.[33] By contrast, the French "are already questioning the overall effect of this emphasis in biblical interpretation."[34] Whereas the Americans constantly turn to papal and conciliar teaching as a warrant for their approach, "the French review the teaching and find it tinged with the assumptions of historical positivism."[35] Given the longest tradition of historical criticism among Catholic scholars it is not surprising that the

Germans stressed an ideal of exegesis that is both historical theological.[36] While the French are concerned for the actualization of Scripture in the life of the Church the Germans call for greater reflection on the hermeneutical implications of the use of historical critical exegesis.[37] Method, rather than content becomes the preoccupation of theology.

Since time does not allow us to retrace this history with Curran, I would like to direct my attention principally to the situation in the United States.

By the late seventies the intellectual atmosphere had shifted dramatically. At least five new factors emerged. **First,** No longer was dissatisfaction with historical criticism characteristic only of conservative Catholics. Theologians and ethicists were at times justifiably bewildered by the excessive technical nature of biblical scholarship, by the avalanche of seemingly arbitrary interpretations, and by the absence of a reflective method for the theological interpretation and pastoral application of Scripture. **Second,** this period also witnessed the emergence of two new specialities within NT studies: social scientific criticism and literary criticism, understood (and used from now on) not as "source criticism" but as it is used in the field of literature in general.[38] "Social scientific methods" is an umbrella phrase for a host of emergent subdisciplines: study of social <u>realia</u>, uncovering the social world <u>behind</u> the text; social history involving both descriptive and methodological issues (e.g. Mar-

xist and feminist interpretation of social history), social organization and reconstruction of the social, symbolic world of early Christianity.[39] In recent years the methods have been broadened and enriched to include considerations from cultural anthropology as well as from social theory, and the sociology of literature. Literary criticism is equally comprehensive covering approaches such as "close reading", reader response criticism, rhetorical criticism, semiotic exegesis, narrative analysis, and deconstruction. While the social scientific methods disclose primarily "the world behind the text," these methods address "the world of the text." The panorama of critical options facing the biblical scholar is well described by Christopher Ricks in a review of Giles Gunn's, The Culture of Criticism and the Criticism of Culture (New York: Oxford Uuniversity Press, 1987):

> The sights stretch as far as the eye can see--to the immense zoo of Kenneth Burke, the bracing gymnasium of Lionel Trilling, the chaffering marketplace of Clifford Geertz, the broadcasting house of Mikhail Bakhtin with its phone-in programs on the logic of the dialogic; all this and then low on the horizon the bog of deconstruction, swallowing everything in readiness for the final exquisite pleasure of swallowing itself. Milton's vast Serbonian bog where whole armies have sunk.[40]

A **third** factor consequent on this and on the entry of Catholic biblical scholarship into the mainstream is that the divisions within biblical scholarship are no longer confessional but rather methodological. A **fourth** factor is the conscious attempt by Catholic scholars in dialog with non-Catholic biblical scholars, philosophers and theologians to evolve a theory of hermeneutics bridging the gap between historical criticism and theological interpretation. Again, Curran notes, much of the ferment for this takes place in France in important articles by Francois Dreyfus and Francois Refloulé,[41] but especially in the United States in the work of Sandra Schneiders and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.[42]

A **fifth** factor is the realization that biblical studies is in a new era often described as postmodern. Conservatives and liberal exegetes and theologians voiced fundamental doubts about historical criticism as one of the surviving heirs of enlightenment rationalism. At a symposium in 1986 Albert Outler called for a "post liberal" hermeneutics as did the more conservative Catholic scholar Denis Farkasfalvy.[43] In a wide ranging comparison of movements in biblical studies with trends in the natural sciences James Martin called for "a post-critical paradigm," and Edgar McKnight summed up a decade of reflection on hermeneutics by outlining in 1988, a Post Modern Use of the Bible.[44] Despite individual differences this proliferation of "posts" shares similarities ably sketched by McKnight and Ted

Peters in a recent article published in Dialog.[45] Postmodernism emerges in the twentieth century in reaction to a modernism which "put critical thinking on the throne of human consciousness."[46] In place of a split between the object and subject of knowledge postmodernism questions pure objectivity in both science and literature and stresses participatory knowledge, with emphasis on the reader and reading process rather than on the author or the referent of the text. There is a call for personal and cosmic wholeness. Postmodernism is religious but not ecclesiastical and while suspicious of metaphysics its hermeneutic offers a new appreciation of symbols as doors to extra subjective meaning (contrast Bultmann's demythologizing with Ricoeur's statement that the symbol gives rise to thought).

It seems that Vatican II no sooner moved the church into the modern world that it was faced with its evolution into postmodernity. In assessing postmodernism, however, we should remember McKinght's caution that his proposal for postmodern criticism "will give no comfort, however, to those who want to avoid the challenge of historical and literary criticism, for the approach is not premodern or precritical."[47] A postmodern approach can exist only in dialog with historical-critical, new critical and structural assumptions and approaches."[48] Often a restorationist reading of Vatican II which arises from the encounter with postmodernism proposes as a solution the return to premodern world views.[49]

Reactions to the postmodern challenge vary. Sandra Schneiders has called for a hermeneutics which integrates Ricoeur's phenomenological reading of texts with Gadamer's stress on the interaction of text and reader whereby readers actualize the unvoiced richness of texts.[50] Similarly Edgar McKnight proposes "reader-oriented criticism".[51] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza offers a pastoral paradigm which combines both critical distance from texts and personal engagement with them.[52] Advocates of Narrative Theology, especially those influenced by George Lindbeck, call for a return to the Bible as the Christian story which both forms and reflects the faith of the community.[53] By the mid-80's many diverse paths opened before our pilgrim biblical scholar.

III. A Modest Proposal

As a brief prelude to my own proposal I would note that one defect of the model of interpretation proposed by the Vatican Council and historical criticism in general is its inadequate understanding of the intricacy of communication in literature or art. Textual communication as the studies of M. H. Abrams, Paul Hernadi and Roman Jakobsen underscore is extraordinarily complex involving minimally an author or agent who communicates through a sign system to readers in a definite context.[54]

The prime rule of hermeneutics which has governed Catholic interpretation since Divinio Afflante Spiritu is to uncover the

literal sense of the text described by Raymond Brown as "the sense which the human author directly intended and which the written words conveyed"[55] While this has been both a liberating and fruitful hermeneutical principle, it focuses too narrowly on one element of the communication process, the intention of the author, which is often the sole determinant of the communicative sign, the text. Whether wittingly or unwittingly the language of the Council presented a "romantic" view of literary interpretation at the very time when this view was disappearing from secular literary criticism.[56]

Contemporary hermeneutical theories stress other aspects of the communication process either the communication itself, the text, or the reader. Reader response criticism and reception theory, for example, cause us to look again at one of the major achievements of Vatican II.[57] The Council was rightly perceived by Catholic and Protestant observers alike as moving in the direction of sola Scriptura, Scripture rather than tradition as the norma normans non normata.[58] Biblical text rather than community interpretation was to be normative.

Today practitioners of reader response criticism would argue that a text has no fixed meaning. Stanley Fish, a pioneer and leading theorist of this movement argues that "interpretive communities" ultimately determine what a text means and how it is used.[59] (Rather ironically this view is close to that of the conservative minority at Vatican II who wanted to subordinate the

text to the "interpretive community" of the magisterium. Stanley Fish, meet Cardinal Ottaviani!!). Insights on how texts achieve meaning in interpretive communities, however, could provide a rich resource for a theology of tradition, which commentators on Vatican II describe as "semantically elusive" and undeveloped theologically.[60]

Nonetheless, I would argue that neither a biblical interpretation based principally on the text centered phenomenological hermeneutics of Ricoeur nor on the reader centered perspective of reader response criticism or reception theory (Fish, Gadamer, McKnight) present an adequate paradigm for hermeneutics.

Logically and responsibly I should enter into critical dialog with these two important methods.[61] Perhaps thankfully neither time nor my own lack of expertise in all aspects of the approaches allow this.

Though agreeing with Sandra Schneiders comment in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary that "the variety of literary-hermeneutical approaches . . . precludes any totalitarian claims for any one method,"[62] I propose that it is rhetorical criticism, especially as understood by the practitioners of the new rhetoric, which offers the most comprehensive resource for theological hermeneutics.[63] Two prenotes are necessary. First, following George A. Kennedy I would describe rhetoric as that quality in the discourse by which a speaker or writer seeks to accomplish his [or her] purposes.[64] The "quality in the dis-

course" is wider than the traditional topoi considered in ancient rhetoric. Second, the New Testament books are fundamentally rhetorical documents.[65] Their original purpose was to move people to action or conviction, to challenge the proud or to console the weary, in short to move the audience to take a position envisioned by the authors.

I do not claim originality for this proposal other than putting together insights drawn from other pilgrims on the way of biblical interpretation. Very important is the work of Wilhelm Wuellner, over the past twenty years, but especially his recently published comprehensive review of rhetoric since the Reformation entitled "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric," (published in Scriptura: Journal of Bible and Theology in Southern Africa 3 (1989) 1-54). Wuellner's fundamental thesis is that "rhetorical criticism of literature takes the exegetes of biblical literature beyond the study of the meanings of texts to something more inclusive than semantics and hermeneutics.[66] He concludes his survey with the following claim:

> "It made a revolutionary difference to take the familiar notion, that human beings in general, and religious persons in particular, are hermeneutically constituted, and replace it with the ancient notion familiar to Jews and Greeks alike, that we are rhetorically constituted. We have not only the capacity to understand the content or propositions of human

> signs and symbols (=hermeneutics); we also have the capacity to respond and interact with them (=rhetorics).[67]

Similarly, writing on "Literary Theory, Philosophy of History and Exegesis," Francis Martin remarks, "The testimony of the Scriptures makes not only meaning claims, but truth claims."[68]

Equally important is the description of the task and method of rhetorical criticism as presented by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in a now published address to the 1987 meeting of the Society for the Study of the New Testament.[69] She describes four stages necessary to rhetorical criticism: (1) identification of the rhetorical interests and models of contemporary interpretation, (2) delineation of the rhetorical arrangement, interests and modifications introduced by the author, (3) elucidation and establishment of the rhetorical situation of the document and (4) reconstruction of the common historical situation and symbolic universe of the writer/speaker and the recipient/audience.[70] This description is similar but not identical with that offered by Wuellner:

> As rhetorical <u>critics</u> (rhetorics as part of literary theory) we face the obligation of critically examining the fateful interrelationships between (1) a text's rhetorical strategies, (2) the premises upon which these strategies

> operate (gender in patriarchy or matriarchy; race in social, political power structures), and (3) the efficacy of both, text and its interpretation (=truth claim, or validity); of both, exegetical practice and its theory (=method).[71]

The major difference in the two approaches is that Wuellner is less sanguine than Schüssler Fiorenza about the historian's ability to reconstructs the "common historical situation and symbolic universe of the writer/speaker and recipient/audience." Wuellner understands by rhetorical situation not simply the particularities of a specific situation, for example that in Corinth, but the change in religious consciousness of the audience on a more fundamental level than that dictated by a particular problem. He seeks the religious power of the text which enabled these texts originally addressed to a particular community to shape other communities, perhaps in Paul's own lifetime, but certainly subsequent to Paul.[72] It is to this issue of the power of religious texts that I now turn.

I draw principally on two contemporary theologians, David Tracy and Edward Schillebeeckx. After describing the New Testament as a text which embodies "the classic, paradigmatic and normative witnesses" to the event-character of God's self-manifestation through Jesus Christ." Tracy then lists two criteria for an interpretation which is adequate to the status of

the New Testament as a classic and **to the original event** (emphasis mine).[73] They are simultaneously (1) an interpretation whose understanding honors in practice the kind of fundamental existential religious questions these texts address, and (2) an interpretation which recognizes that the fundamental disclosure of the text--the world in front of, not behind, all these texts-- is the world of religious event.[74] While Tracy's call for a recognition of the world of religious event embodied in the New Testament texts is more programmatic, the magisterial two volume study of the New Testament by Edward Schillebeeckx lays bare the religious experiences emerging from the religious event which we call early Christianity.[75]

At the risk of over simplifying I would argue that Schillebeeckx's two volumes probe those fundamental experiences which give power to the texts of the New Testament. First is the experience of Jesus and its impact on his disciples. Two elements of Jesus' earthly ministry are foundations of the continuity and of the whole subsequent development of New Testament theology. Paramount is the Abba experience of Jesus, his trusting and intimate sense of the caring presence of God. Second is Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom because of which he is remembered as the eschatological prophet, the immediate precursor of the new age who announces God's definitive act of salvation and enacts it in his ministry, especially to the outcasts. The offer of salvation

and trusting access to God experienced by Jesus' followers during his life is renewed through the proclamation of the risen one.

The second volume, Christ, continues to explore early Christian experience and its implication for faith today, in dialog with the Pauline epistles. As in the first volume an important hermeneutical principle is the correlation between the experience of early Christians and the situation facing believers today. Despite differences in expression and in communities, Schillebeeckx writes: "A fundamentally identical experience underlies the various interpretations to be found throughout the New Testament: all its writings bear witness to the experience of salvation in Jesus from God."[76]

I would argue that fundamental to Schillebeeckx's hermeneutics is an analogy of experience. Analogy is neither the identical reproduction of early Christian experience nor is it mere similarity. A true description of analogy involves all those elements necessary to reconstruct the rhetorical situation of a document. The relation of early Christians who hear or read the original message in their situation and in the manner in which they are challenged to respond is analogous, that is both simultaneously similar to and different from that of Christian believers of subsequent ages. Fundamentalism would affirm that the experience of believers today is identical or similar to that of the first audience. The process of **distanciation** recommended

by Ricoeur as contemporary readers move from the first to the second naivete is a prerequisite for the analogy of experience.[77]

By way of a summary of what might seem to be an overly complex program, I would argue that rhetorical criticism in giving due attention to the role of author, text, and recipient in a communication process offers the best model for understanding and appropriating biblical texts. Since these texts are religious and in their original setting made claims to truth and summoned people to conversion and commitment, rhetorical criticism must be supplemented by examination of how religious texts achieve power and how the original and originating experience of these texts can exercise their power today.

Conclusion

Our pilgrim seems to have travelled a winding and rocky way in the last 25 years and may seem lost or hesitant as many new and explored paths open up. I would argue, though, this journey followed the beacons lit by Vatican II. Vatican II summoned Catholics to make this journey no longer in isolation or in arrogant self-justification. The common task facing us is whether communities once divided over the issue of <u>sola scriptura</u> can speak with reasoned conviction to a world increasingly satisfied with <u>nulla Scriptura</u>. Ed Farley has recently cataloged the "collapse of the house of [biblical] authority." Can we find amid the debris of this house a family bible and return it to its rightful owners?

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End Notes

1. See Y. Congar, "Towards a Pilgrim Church," in A. Stacepoole, ed., Vatican II Revisited (Minneapolis, MN: Winston, Press, 1986) 148.

2. A full history remains to be written. Excellent overviews are Raymond F. Collins, Introduction to the New Testament (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987) 356-86 and John S. Kselman and Ronald D. Witherup, "Modern New Testament Criticism," New Jerome Biblical Commentary [hereafter NJBC], R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer, R.E. Murphy (eds.) (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989) 1142-45 (on Catholic critical scholarship); R.E. Brown and T.A. Collins, "Church Pronouncements," Ibid., 1166-74. For the United States see, Gerald P. Fogarty, American Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A History from the Early Republic to Vatican II (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).

3. Collected in Enchridion Biblicum (Rome: Editiones A. Arnodo, 1956), esp. Nos. 181-84 (Moses is the principal author of the Pentateuch and did not draw on sources); 324-31 (on historicity of Genesis 1-3); 390-400 (Catholic scholars may discuss the Synoptic Problem, but not adopt the two source theory). English Translations in Official Catholic Teaching: Bible Interpretation, James J. Megivern, ed. (Wilmington, NC: McGrath Publ. Co., 1978) pp. 228-252. These decrees were subsantially reinterpreted in 1955, see CBQ 18 (1956) 23-29. For summary and discussion of these see, R. Brown and T. A. Collins, NJBC, 1171-72.

4. Gerald P. Fogarty, S.J.,American Catholic Biblical Scholarship, 198.

5. Text in EB, pp. 200-227; Eng. trans in Megivern, Bible Interpretation, pp. 316-42. For early reactions see, A. Bea, "Divino Afflante Spiritu: De recentissimis Pii XII litteris encyclicis," Bib 24 (1943) 313-22; F. Braun, Les etudes bibliques d'apres l'encyclique de S.S. Pie XII "Divino Afflante Spiritu" (Fribourg: Libraire de l'Universite, 1946); M.Grunthaner, "Divino Afflante Spiritu. The New Encyclical on Biblical Studies," AER 110 (19444) 330-37; 111 (1944) 43-52; 119-23.

6. EB, No. 555; Megivern, ed. Bible Interpretation, 331.

7. EB, 557; Megivern, Bible Interpretation, 331.

8. EB, 552,553; Megivern, Bible Interpretation, 328-29;

9. Among them were Raymond E. Brown, S.S. and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., two of the most renowed biblical scholars of the past twenty-five years.

10. For a chronicle of these attacks, see J. A. Fitzmyer, Joseph A. "A Recent Roman Scriptural Convroversy," Theological Studies 22 (1961) 426-44; also R.E. Brown, "Church Pronouncements," NJBC, 1168.

11. The Council is customarily divided into four stages, (1) Ante-preparatory, Jan. 25-Feb. 16, 1960; (2) Preparatory, June 5, 1960-July 1962; (3) The Four Council Session (October 1962-December, 1965); (4) The promulgation of the decress and implementation of other directives (e.g. the reform of Canon Law.) See, Pacomio, Dei Verbum, 10-11; Aram Berard, Preparatory

Reports: Second Vatican Council (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965) 22-23. The documentatation for the ante-preparatory and preparatory phase are collected in the multivolume Acta et Documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II Apparando. Series I (Ante-Preparatoria) Series II (Preparatoria) (Rome Polyglot Press, 1969--)

12. Aram Berard, Preparatory Reports: Second Vatican Council (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965) 22-23.

13. For the chronological development of the Decree see U. Betti, La Costituzione Dogmatica Sulla Divina Rivelazione (Turin: Elle Di Ci, 1967) 13-68, schematically summarized in L. Pacomio, Dei Verbum: Genesi Della Constituzione Sulla Divina Rivelazione (N.P. Marietti, 1971) 10-12, and J. Ratzinger, in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, H. Vorgrimler, ed. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) III:155-166. For other commentaries on the Decree on Revelation, see L. Alonso Schökel, ed. Concilio Vaticano II: Commentarios a la Constitución sobre la divnia revelación (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1969); B-D Dupuy, ed. Vatican II: La Révélation Divine (2 Vols; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968); C. Hampe, ed. Die Autorität der Freiheit (Munich: Kosel Verlag, 1967) I:109-239; R. Latourelle, Theology of Revelation (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1968) 453-488; O. Sammelroth and M. Zerwick, Vaticanum II über das Wort Gottes (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien, 16; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966); R. Schutz and M. Thurian, Revelation: A Protestant View (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1966); E. Stakenmeier, Die

Konstitution über die gottliche Offenbarung (Paderborn: Bonifatius Verlag, 1967).

14. For the Text of this Schema and its subsequent discussion, "De Fontibus Revelationis," see Acta et Documenta, Ser. II 2/1 (1965) 523-63.

15. Ratzinger comments: "the working sub-commission remained largely autonomous and its members used the suggestions as they saw fit." in Vorgimler, ed. Commentary, III:159.

16. The official acts of the Council are contained in Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II (Vatican City: Polyglot Press, 1970-80) For the Nov. 10, 1961 schema on revelation see 1/3 (1971) 14-26; Pacomio, Dei Verbum, 22-31.

17. No 4, Pacomio, Dei Verbum, 23. On ambiguity of Trent see Ratzinger, in Commentary, Vorgimler (ed), III:156-57.

18. No 12; Pacomio, Dei Verbum, 25-26.

19. No 22; Pacomio, Dei Verbum, 29. On Pope John XIII's understanding of the Council, see his opening address, in Walter M. Abbott, ed. The Documents of Vatican II (New York: America Press, 1966), esp. pp. 714-715, "She [the church] considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching, rather than by condemnations" (715).

20. Acta Synodolia I/3 pp. 131-259 for speeches. For a description of these days and a summary of the speeches see Xavier Rynne, Vatican Council II. (New York: Farrar, Staus and Giroux, 1968) 1.76-92 (4 volumes in one).

21. In Vorgrimler, ed. Commentary, III:160.

22. Ibid, original in Acta Synodolia, I/3 184-85.

23. "The Reception of Vatican II," in G. Alberigo, J-P. Jossua, and J. A. Komonchak, eds. The Reception of Vatican II (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987) 9.

24. Rynne, Vatican Council II, 91

25. This tension of perspectives was perceived during the conciliar debates by Cardinal Emile Léger of Montreal who felt that the Council did not submit tradition strongly enough to the authority of the word, and noted shortly after the Council by Abbot Christopher Butler, OSB, who wrote" "It is all very well for us to say and believe that the magisterium is subject to holy Scripture . But is there anybody who is in a position to tell the magisterium: Look you are not practicing your subjection to Scripture in your teaching," in J. J. Miller, ed. Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1966) 89.

26. This sentence which was introduced into the Council text during its final redaction is treated extensively by I. de la Potterie, "Interpretation of Holy Scritpure in the Spirit in Which It Was Written (Dei Verbum 12c), in H. Latourelle, ed. Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives Twenty Five Years After (1962-87) (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1988) I, 220-266. While giving an interesting history of the phrase, de la Potterie wishes to make it the hermeneutical key to the whole decree, basing his argument on a forced chiastic structure of the final text. See also D. Farkasfalvy, "The Case for Spiritual Exegesis," Communio

10 (1983): 332-350.

27. Shortly after the Council J. Ratzinger wrote: "Even now, after the Council, it is not possible to say that the question of the relation between critical and Church exegesis, historical research and dogmatic tradition has been settled. All that is certian is that from now on it will be impossible to ignore the critical historical method and that, precisely as such, it is in accordance with the aims of theology itself." In Vorgrimler, ed. Commentary, III:158.

28. For example, I would agree with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza that her hermeneutical program is in continuity with Vatican II, however unsettling this may sound in some circles.

29. Dial.adv. Lucif. 19; PL XXIII, 172C.

30. See esp. R. E. Brown, "Historical Biblical Criticism and Ecumenical Discussion," in Richard J Neuhaus (ed), Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) 24-49.

31. Full title, Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation Interpretation of Scripture: The Catholic Discussion of a Biblical Hermeneutic: 1958-83.

32. I follow Curran's summary in Historical Criticism, 299-309.

33. For a summary of the importance and achievements of historical criticism, see J. A. Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism: Its Role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life" TS 50 (1989) 244-59. For an example of an ungrounded and unscholarly attack

see, George A. Kelly, The New Biblical Theorists: Raymond Brown and Beyond (Ann Arbor, MI:Servant Books, 1983).

34. Ibid. 301.

35. Ibid. 302.

36. Ibid. 304.

37. Ibid. 304.

38. For an excellent description of these emerging methods see, Sandra Schneiders, NJBC, 1158-60.

39. Jonathan Smith, "The Social Description of Early Christianity," Religious Studies Review 1 (1975) 19-25.

40. NY Times, Book Review, May 10, 1987, p. 10,..

41. See esp. F. Dreyfus, "Exégèse en Sorbonne, exégèse en Église," Revue Biblique 82 (1976) 161-202 and "L'actualisation de l'Écriture. I--Du text à la vie," Revue Biblique 86 (1979) 5-58; 161-93. "L'actualisation de l'Écriture. II--L'action de l'Esprit," Ibid. 161-93; F. Refoulé, "L'exégèse en question," Supplement 111 (1974) 391-423.

42. Curran covers the following articles: Sandra M. Schneiders, "Faith, Hermeneutics, and the Literal Sense of Scripture," TS 39 (1978) 719-36; "From Exegesis to Hermeneutics: The Problem of the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture," Horizons 89 (1981) 23-39; "The Footwashing (Jn 13:1-20). An Experiment in Hermeneutics," CBQ 43 (1981) 76-92; "The Paschal Imagination: Objectivity and Subjectivity in New Testament Intrepretation," TS 43 (1982) 52-68. For Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, see Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation (Boston:

Beacon Press, 1984).

43. A. C. Outler, "Toward a Postliberal Hermeneutics," Theology Today 42 (1985) 281-91; D. Farkasfalvy, "The Case for Spiritual Exegesis," Communio 10 (1983): 332-350.

44. J. P. Martin, "Toward a Post-Critical Paradigm," NTS 33 (1987) 370-85. Edgar V. McKnight, Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988)

45. Reference to be supplied

46. Ibid.

47. McKnight, Post-Modern Use, 14.

48. Ibid.

49. David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity and Postmodernity," TS 50 (1989) 554-555.

50. See esp. her essay, "Does the Bible Have a Postmodern Message?" in Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World, Frederic B. Burnham, ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989) 56-73.

51. Above, n. 42

52. Above, n 42.

53. First proposed in G. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984) esp. 112-138, see also, "The Story Shaped Church: Critical Exegesis and Theological Interpretation," in G. Green, ed. Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation

(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) and "Scripture, Consensus and Community," in Neuhaus, ed. Biblical Interpretation in Crisis, 74-101.

54. The seminal essay for a "communications model" is R. Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in T. A. Sebeok, ed. Style in Narrative (Cambridge: M.I.T., 1960) 350-77. A clear adaptation of this can be found in R. Scholes, Semiotics and Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University, 1982) 17-36. See also M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: W.W. Norton, 1958), esp. 3-29; Paul Hernadi, "Literary Theory: A Compass for Critics," Critical Inquiry 3 (1976) 369-86.

55. "Hermeneutics," NJBC, 1148, see Dei Verbum, art. 12.

56. On romantic interpretation, see esp. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, 21-26.

57. For an overview, see E. V. McKnight, The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 75-82. A leading figure in this approach is W. Iser, The Implied Reader (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974). See also the essays in J. P. Tompkins, ed. Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ., 1980).

58. For a catholic view see Karl Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi (New York: Seabury, 1975) 1550-51; for two Protestant positions see, Oscar Cullmann, "The Bible in the Council," in G.

Lindbeck, George A, ed. Dialog on the Way: Protestant Report From the Vatican Council (Minneapolis, Mn.: Augsburg Publ. House, 1965) 129-44, esp. 133 and Paul Minear, in Miller, (ed), Vatican II: An Intefaith Appraisal, pp. 68-88.

59. Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), esp. 1-17; 147-80; 303-21; for a helpful summary of Fish, see Fred C. Burnett, "Postmodern Biblical Criticism: The Eve of Historical Criticism," to appear in Semeia.

60. See essays of Cullmann and Minear, above, n. 58.

61. For critical comments on Ricoeur's project see esp. Hans W. Frei, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will It Break?" in F. McConnell, ed. The Bible and the Narrative Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Martin, J. P. "Toward a Post-Critical Paradigm," NTS 33 (1987) 370-85. For strong criticisms of rereception theory criticism see Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 66-90 and Stephen Moore, "Doing Gospel/Criticism As/With A 'Reader'" BTB 19 (1989) 85-91.

62. "Hermeneutics," NJBC, 1160.

63. On the "new rhetoric" see T. Sloan and C. Perelman, "Rhetoric," The New Encylcopedia Britannica, 15th ed. (1987) Vol. 26, 803-810, and C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1969). Also, W. Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical

Criticism Taking Us?" CBQ 49 (1987) 448-63.

64. New Testament Through Rhetorical Criticism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 3.

65. See McKnight, Postmodern Use, pp. 103, 107.

66. "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric," 1.

67. Ibid. 38.

68. Thomist 52 (1988) 577

69. "Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in 1 Corinthians" NTS 33 (1987) 386-403; also, "The Followers of the Lamb: Visionary Rhetoric and Social-Political Situation," in Discipleship in the New Testament, F. Segovia, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 144-165

70. "Rhetorical Situation," 388-89.

71. "Hermeneutics and Rhetorics," 38.

72. Based on personal conversation with Prof. Wuellner in discussion of his article

73. David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 259, 281.

74. Ibid. 259.

75. Edward Schillebeeckx, Jesus: An Experiment in Christology (New York: Seabury, 1980); Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord (New York: Crossroad, 1983). For Schillebeckx's more concise description of his project see, Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ (New York: Crossroad, 1981). I have described his work in more detail in "The Chaning Shape of New Testament Theology,"

TS 50 (1989) 323-28. On importance of "experience" in his theology see, L. Dupré, "Experience and Interpretation: A Philosophical Reflection on Schillebeeckx's," Jesus and Christ, TS 43 (1982) 30-51.

76. Christ, 463

77. See the helpful exposition of Ricouer by Lewis Mudge in Paul Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 1-40.