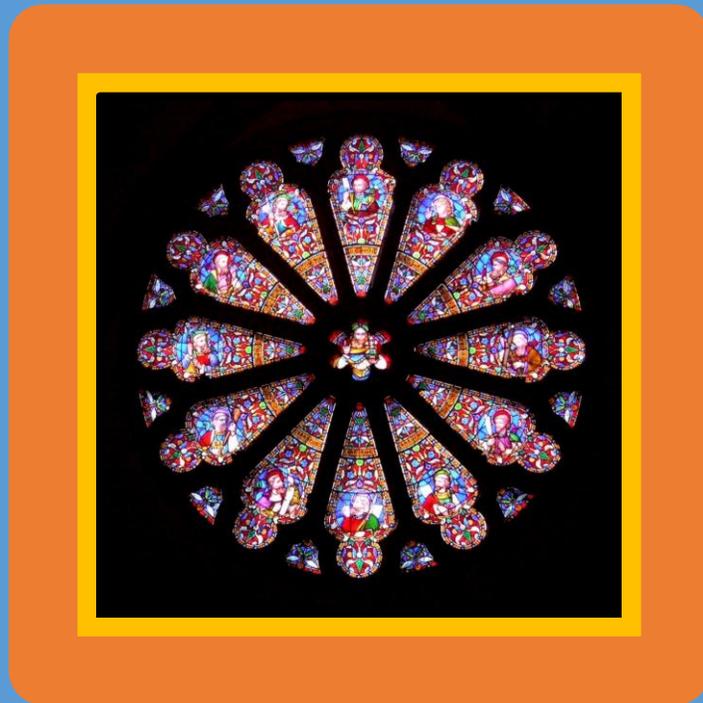


# UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE: A CATHOLIC APPROACH TO INTERPRETING SACRED SCRIPTURE

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In this essay we look at the meaning of Divine Revelation, the meaning of inspiration, and what the Bible is, including who wrote it, and when, where, how, and why it was written, and how the books were selected. Also, we examine the senses of scripture and typology as well as guidelines for reading and interpreting it. Furthermore, we discuss the different exegetical or hermeneutical tools and translation theories. Moreover, we consider the similarities and differences of Catholic and Protestant versions of the Bible and of the meaning of the apocryphal writings.

Catholic Apologetics

# Understanding the Bible: A Catholic Approach to Interpreting Sacred Scripture

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## Understanding the Bible: A Catholic Approach to Interpreting Sacred Scripture

By Monsignor Lawrence Moran & Ronald J. Eldred

### INTRODUCTION

Catholics and most Protestants tend to look at interpreting the Bible differently. Contemporary Roman Catholic, Anglican (Episcopalian), and Lutheran scholars tend to read much of the Bible in an allegorical sense. By allegory is meant a literary form that tells a story to present a truth or to enforce a moral point of view. Catholics, at least since the time of St Augustine, have interpreted the Bible in two senses: the literal and the spiritual. The meaning of the literal sense is pretty obvious; it means what it says; however, the spiritual sense is broken down further into three additional senses: the analogical sense, which means similarity; the tropological sense, which means moral; and the anagogical sense, by which is meant matters dealing with salvation and the final destination of humankind. Catholics apply the three spiritual senses to the entire Bible and not just the book of Genesis. We will discuss the senses of Scripture below in this essay.

Interpreting the Bible in the spiritual sense makes it easier for Catholics to accept various scientific theories, such as the theory of evolution. Catholics follow the saying of St. Augustine in the fourth century followed by Cardinal Baronius in 1598 that, “The Bible teaches the way to go to heaven, but not the way the heavens go.” On the other hand, Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants tend to take a more literal interpretation of the Bible, sometimes called fundamentalism, which means they interpret the Book of Genesis and the rest of the Bible strictly in a literal sense. In other words, they interpret the Bible as “the way the heavens go.” Instead of seeing the Bible as containing a spiritual meaning, they see it essentially as a literal scientific or historical explanation of the origin of the universe or the history of the world. Although Catholics don’t ordinarily see the Bible as a scientific or historical text, nonetheless, they do interpret the Bible literally when the text is intended to be interpreted that way; however, only the Catholic Church can tell us when the Bible is to be interpreted literally.

First we will look at what the Bible is, who wrote it, and when, how, and why it was written. Also, we will examine the senses of Scripture as well as the Catholic principles for interpreting the Bible. Furthermore, we’ll discuss the different exegetical or hermeneutical tools and the meaning of inspiration. Moreover, we’ll consider the similarities and differences of Catholic and Protestant versions of the Bible and of the meaning of the apocryphal writings. We’ll also take a brief look at the history of biblical interpretation, but the details are left for another essay. We will save what is in the Bible itself for two other essays on Salvation History where we consider the creation, fall, and redemption of humankind as told in the Bible.

### DIVINE REVELATION

In our essay found in this website entitled *Reasons to Believe: Natural Theology*, we provide reasons to believe that what the Catholic Church teaches is true. First we discuss what it means to believe something, especially the truths that God has revealed to us. This involves examining the role of faith, reason, and certitude in our search for truth. Then using human reason, we discuss arguments that make it reasonable to believe that God exists. All other knowledge of religion presupposes that he does. Once establishing that God does exist, using human reason we identify his attributes or perfections. Then based on rational proof of God's existence and something of his attributes, using human reason we establish that we owe God worship, thanks-giving, and obedience. Furthermore, we prove beyond a reasonable doubt the human soul is immortal and that God established an objective moral order called the natural law.

However, because of our fallen human nature, there is a limit to what we can know about God using human reason. We need his revelation. At this point of our discussions we offer arguments that make it reasonable to believe that God established a church and that church is the Catholic Church and that he revealed himself to us. During this discussion we examine the credibility and integrity of the sources of revelation—Scripture and Tradition. However, it is in this and other essays that we offer the details about Divine Revelation.

#### *Purposes of the Bible*

It has been said that the Bible has three uses. The *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* tells us that:

1. The Bible is a source of divine revelation. God has spoken to men in two ways, through Scripture and through Tradition. The Council of Trent stated that "both founts of revelation, Scripture and Tradition, are to be esteemed equally."
2. Scriptural passages are always used in the Church's liturgy. Both the praise of God and petitions to God found in liturgical prayer are either given in the words of the Bible or in a manner modeled after Scripture, e.g., the Psalms. Moreover, the reading and instruction that is incorporated in the liturgy is taken largely from Scripture.

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3. Scripture is a religious book to be used also for one's personal spiritual life. Saint Jerome said that "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ". No better book of personal spiritual reading could be found.

### *The meaning of Divine Revelation*

Revelation means that the Word of God the Father, the Supreme Truth, has spoken to humankind and has revealed truths, which are not in themselves evident to the human mind. This gives us the choice of either rejecting revelation altogether, or accepting it by faith. This means that we must submit our intellect to truths, which we cannot understand, but which come to us on Divine authority. As we discussed in our Catholic radio series *Reasons to Believe: Catholic Apologetics* and in our essay *Reasons to Believe, Natural Theology*, the only adequate answer to why we believe with Divine faith any Divine truth is because God has revealed it, who can neither deceive or be deceived.

However, as we also discussed in that series and essay, the idea that faith is blind is false. To quote Vatican I on this matter, "We believe that revelation is true, not indeed because the intrinsic truth of the mysteries is clearly seen by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God Who reveals them, for He can neither deceive nor be deceived." St. Thomas Aquinas said regarding this matter, "A man would not believe unless he saw the things he had to believe, either by the evidence of miracles or of something similar." The saint is here speaking of the motives of credibility, which we discussed in some detail in these documents.

What do we know about God through revelation, and therefore on faith, that is unknown by mere reason? There is a vast difference in the depth or wealth of supernatural knowledge from God's revelation to humankind compared with the natural rational knowledge accessible to humankind through reason. We can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that God exists and something of his attributes by using our reason, but there is a great limitation to what we can know in this manner. The genius of an Aristotle or Plato discovered a lot about God using human reason, but they never even came close to conceive of a God of three Divine Persons who loves us and created us to be part of his extended family. We even get a glimpse of God's plural nature when he said in the Book of Genesis, "let us make man to our image and likeness". There is only one God, but God is a family of three Persons who made human beings like him and to live with him and with others. We could never have known this by reason alone.

It is also far above the ability of the unaided human mind apart from revelation that God so loved the world that he became man to become like us and to be one of us. Fr. John Hardon, one of the world's greatest theologians and catechists until his death in 2000, tells us that Love wants to

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become like the one whom it loves. He says, “What mind boggling truth we believe in when we believe, as we do on faith, that the God of creation, the God of the billowing seas and the towering mountains and the stars millions of light years away, this God became a little child.”

What else does divine revelation tell us about God that we could never have known by reason alone? We could not have known that God became man, not only to become like us, but also to suffer and die for us. Fr. Hardon says that knowing this we should want to suffer and die for him. He says, “No intellect, no thousand human intellects would ever conceive of a God like this unless He had vouchsafed to reveal Himself as the God who died on the cross.” Furthermore, Father tells us that “God became man in order to teach us who He is and what He wants us to do. . . .” Moreover, he says that “God revealed Himself to show us how we are to serve Him. That is why He came into the world a speechless child, an infant, so that by following in His footsteps as the way we might reach the God from whom we came. More still and finally, what is there more to God's revelation about Himself than we could ever acquire by natural reason? We learn from God become man that “He wants to share not only creatures, He wants to share Himself with us. So that by sharing Himself with us we might want to share ourselves with Him.”

### *Why is it reasonable to believe that God revealed Himself*

Although we can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that God does exist by the use of our reason, as we have said, much of what we know about him is through divine revelation. This is true because of the original sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Because of the Fall, we possess diminished intellects and weakened wills as well as concupiscence—the desire to sin. In other words, after the Fall, our human nature was wounded and a veil was created between God and humans so that they no longer had a more direct communication with God.

Although the human race lost its friendship with God when Adam and Eve sinned and were driven from the Garden of Eden, God still loved humankind and planned to redeem us one day. Moreover, human beings still had the law of God written on their hearts—the Natural Law. As we discussed in our series on the Nicene Creed, about 4,000 years ago God began to gradually reveal himself to his Chosen People, the Hebrews or Israelites. His revelation to them is recorded in the Old Testament (Covenant). The story of the covenants that God made with his Chosen People are told in the books of the Old Testament.

And God continued to reveal himself to mankind in the New Testament. Jesus, the Son of God the Father, told us much about himself and his relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit, which is recorded in the New Testament. The Hebrews had not known that God consisted of three divine Persons. He also revealed to us the law of the love of neighbor as told in the Sermon on the Mount

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and at the Last Supper. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ fulfilled and sealed the covenants that God had made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David in the Old Testament. As St. Augustine said, the New and Everlasting Covenant or the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament. One of the objectives of these essays on the Bible is to look at some examples of Old Testament being fulfilled in the New.

Did God continue to reveal himself to us after the close of the New Testament? In a sense he did. Although Divine Revelation officially ended when John finished the Book of Revelation, God has continued to inspire us with knowledge of himself through the writings of the Church Fathers, saints, theologians, Church Councils, and Popes down through the ages. They have not provided us with anything new in regard to what it takes for us to achieve Heaven, but they have helped us to better understand what God has revealed to us and how to better apply it to our lives. This is known as the development of doctrine.

## SACRED SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

### *Sacred Scripture (the Bible)*

Revelation is found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. Sacred Scripture is the Holy Bible. The word Bible derives from the Greek *biblia*, meaning the books. The term originally derived from *byblos*, meaning “papyrus”, from the ancient Phoenician city of Byblos, which exported this writing material to other parts of the Mediterranean World in ancient times. Papyrus was a paper made from a water reed once abundant in Egypt. The term Bible was applied to the Hebrew and Aramaic scriptures of Judaism (Old Testament) as well as the Greek Scriptures of Christianity (New Testament, Pentateuch).

The Bible is not a single book, but is actually a collection of books written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and accepted by the Catholic Church as the word of God. The *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* says that “Since the Bible is inspired, God is its author, and it can contain no errors. Hence the Bible is a unique book, the only one of its kind; no other book has God for its author.”

### *Sacred Tradition*

The Catholic Church has always distinguish between Sacred Scripture and Tradition. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that “Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put

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down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.” Whereas “[Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching” (No. 81). The *Catechism* continues: “As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence” (No. 82). The *Catechism* concludes this discussion of Tradition by stating, “The Tradition here in question comes from the apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus’ teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit. The first generation of Christians did not yet have a written New Testament, and the New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living Tradition” (No. 83).

The *Catechism* is saying here that Scripture or the Bible itself was initially a part of Tradition. This point is extremely important, because the first century Christians at first transmitted what Jesus said and did orally, and only writing it down later when the Church started to spread far beyond the boundaries of the Holy Land and Christians came to realize that Jesus was not going to return during their lifetimes. In other words, New Testament began as a part of Holy Tradition. On this matter *Dei Verbum*, the Vatican II document on Sacred Scripture, says that all of Jesus’ teachings were at first unwritten and considered part of the living Tradition of the Church. It continues:

[The] Gospel had been promised in former times through the prophets, and Christ Himself had fulfilled it and promulgated it with His lips. This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The commission was fulfilled, too, by those Apostles and apostolic men who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing.

But even after the Gospels were written before the end of the first century, not everything Jesus said and did was included in them. These remaining teachings are what came to be called Sacred Tradition, which, as the Church says, carry equal importance with the written teachings included in the Bible. In this regard, St. John tells us at the end of his Gospel, “But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). Of course, John was here using hyperbole or exaggeration, a technique often used in the ancient Mediterranean world to make a point; nonetheless, he means to say that Jesus said and did a lot more things than are written in his Gospel. To summarize what I have been saying, in the earliest days of the Church (after Jesus’ ascension into Heaven), all of the teachings of Jesus consisted of Tradition until part of them was

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included in the Bible. In a very real sense, the Sacred Scriptures themselves are a part of Sacred Tradition.

To make sure that you understand more precisely what Tradition contains, let's look at what is included in Tradition! Tradition includes not only Holy Scripture, but also ancient creeds such as the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, and ancient catechisms such as the *Didiche*, ancient liturgies and other unvarying practices since apostolic times, the writings of the Church Fathers and Doctors, and Church ecumenical councils, especially those of the Church's formative years, such as the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. and Constantinople in 381 A.D, and archaeological monuments that testify to how Christians believed and worshiped over the centuries. Specific doctrines include the validity of infant baptism, the perpetual virginity of Mary, the Assumption of Mary, and the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Also included are revealed truths of faith and morals given by Christ or the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and passed on from them to us without being written in the Bible, but written down elsewhere. Regarding tradition, St Paul tells us, "To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:14-15). Tradition is a living thing. Ultimately it is the Word of God the

Father, which St. John tells us is our Lord Jesus Christ.

In summary, the Bible and Tradition are equally sources of God's revelation! The *Catechism* tells us that Sacred Tradition carries equal weight with Sacred Scripture in the Church, for "[The] Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, 'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence'" (No. 82).

Most teaching contained in Tradition has explicit or at least implicit biblical support. By this we mean that all of the Church's doctrines are found either explicitly or at least implicitly in the Bible. By implicit we mean unexpressed or specific support. The Church has placed a lot more emphasis on the role of the Bible in the transmission of the faith since Vatican Council II, we suspect for ecumenical reasons. Most Protestants believe that God's entire revelation is contained in the Holy Bible, what is called *Sola Scriptura* in Latin or "Scripture alone" in English. In spite of this, , let us remind you what St Paul said regarding tradition: "brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:14-15).

### *How to properly read and interpret Holy Scripture*

Catholics take a much different position on Biblical interpretation than do most Protestants. Pro-

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testants in general consider the Bible to be the sole source of God's revelation, what has been called in Latin *Sola Scriptura* and in English “Bible or Scripture alone”. Moreover, Catholics and Protestants differ considerably over the matter of biblical interpretation. Protestants consider interpretation a matter of private judgment and that the Holy Spirit helps each person to correctly interpret the Bible, whereas Catholics believe that the Holy Spirit protects only the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Church from error when interpreting the Bible. As the *Catechism* tells us, we Catholics believe that God entrusted the task of interpreting Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition exclusively to the *magisterium*, which exercises this authority in the name of Jesus Christ. This authority is possessed only by God's representative on earth, the pope, and those bishops who are in communion with him (*Catechism*, No. 100). In this regard, the Vatican II document on Sacred Scripture, *Dei Verbum*, says, “This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith every-thing which it presents for belief as divinely revealed” (*Dei Verbum*, Documents of Vatican II). Catholics believe that the Bible was written by and for the Catholic Church and only the Church is protected by the Holy Spirit when interpreting it. *Dei Verbum* makes clear “that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God’s most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls” (Documents of Vatican II). In other words, the Bible, sacred tradition, and the Church's magisterium are all necessary ingredients to a proper interpretation of God's revelation.

## HERMENEUTICS AND EXEGESIS

There are two terms essential to understanding Biblical interpretation: hermeneutics and exegesis. The two terms are often used interchangeably, but technically they have different meanings.

**Hermeneutics:** The 1913 edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* states that hermeneutics derives from a Greek word associated with the god Hermes, who was known as the interpreter of the gods. The Roman version of Hermes was Mercury. Hermeneutics, then, is associated with interpretation; in our case interpretation of the Bible. The *Encyclopedia* goes on to say, “It would be wrong to infer from this that the word denotes the interpretation or exegesis of Sacred Scripture. Usage has restricted the meaning of hermeneutics’ to the science of biblical exegesis, that is “to the collection of rules which govern the right interpretation of Sacred Scripture. Exegesis is therefore related to hermeneutics, as language is to grammar, or as reasoning is to logic. Men spoke and reasoned before there was any grammar or logic; but it is very difficult to speak correctly and reason rightly at all times and under any circumstances without a knowledge of grammar and

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logic.” So, it seems from this that hermeneutics is the rules of biblical interpretation and exegesis is the process of doing it in accordance with the rules. Exegesis then is the concrete practice of interpretation. It is an explanation or critical interpretation of the Bible, whereas hermeneutics is the study of the methodological principles of interpretation of the Bible.

This interpretation is confirmed by Fr. John Hardon's definition of hermeneutics in his *Modern Catholic Dictionary* where he defines hermeneutics as “The art and science of interpreting the Sacred Scriptures and of inquiring into their true meaning. It defines the laws that exegetes are to follow in order to determine and explain the sense of the revealed word of God. It presupposes that the interpreter has knowledge of the biblical languages and of such sciences as contribute to a better understanding of Holy Writ.” By science is meant a method or procedure or set of steps for studying the Bible. These sciences include geography, archeology, history, linguistics, and the like. Hermeneutics is then “a general science or method of text interpretation”, not the actual interpretation itself.

**Exegesis:** Fr. Hardon defines exegesis as “The art and science of investigating and expressing the true sense of Sacred Scripture. Its function is to find out what exactly a given passage of the Bible says. Its rules are governed by the science of hermeneutics, whose practical application is concern of exegesis. Given the depth and complexity of the biblical text, biblical exegesis has been practiced from pre-Christian times.” The key to understanding the difference between the two definitions is hermeneutics is the “art and science of interpreting the Sacred Scriptures” whereas exegesis is the “art and science of investigating and expressing the true sense of Sacred Scripture.” Exegesis then is the technical word for the process of interpreting Scripture. Prof. Felix Just, S.J., a leading biblical scholar, says that exegesis is “the careful investigation of the original meaning of a text in its historical and literary contexts.” He says that the word comes from a Greek verb meaning “to lead or draw out of”. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* gives us an idea what exegesis involves where it states:

Exegesis is the scholarly interpretation of religious texts, using linguistic, historical, and other methods. In Judaism and Christianity, it has been used extensively in the study of the Bible. Textual criticism tries to establish the accuracy of biblical texts. Philological criticism deals with grammar, vocabulary, and style in pursuit of faithful translation. Literary criticism classifies texts according to style and attempts to establish authorship, date, and audience. Tradition criticism seeks the sources of biblical materials and traces their development. Redaction criticism examines the way pieces of the tradition have been assembled into a literary composition by editors. Form criticism studies the way narratives are shaped by the cultures that produce them. Historical criticism looks at a text's historical context.

The ideal in exegesis is to draw out the meaning of the text, but what about when persons read

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meaning into the Bible? This is called eisegesis. Exegesis is an attempt to view the text of the Bible as objectively as possible, without allowing presuppositions to determine one's interpretations, whereas eisegesis involves subjectivity and as Fr. Just tells us is “reading [your own opinions] into the text.”

## INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now that we have discussed a few terms necessary to understanding biblical interpretation, let's go on to the topic of interpretation itself. Since the Bible was written by human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, why has it been so hard to understand or to interpret it over the centuries? The main reason is the Bible has both a human and divine authors. It is hard to understand because it is God's revelation to us, and much of revelation is a mystery. God inspired the human authors to write down what they did.

What does the Catholic Church teach us about inspiration with regard to the composition of the Bible? Although God uses human authors, the *Catechism* tells us that he is the principal author of Sacred Scripture. The *Catechism* states in this regard:

The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit' 'For Holy Mother Church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, 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' (No. 105).

The *Catechism* goes on to say that God made full use of the abilities of the human authors he chose to write Sacred Scripture; nonetheless they wrote only what he wanted them to write, “and no more”. It continues, “Since God inspired the writers of the entire Bible, [All] that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, [and] we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures” (No. 106).

### *The Bible is free from all error*

Since God is the principal author of the Bible, then it should be free from all error. What does this mean? The doctrine that the Bible is free from error is known as “inerrancy of the Bible”. This does not mean that the Bible is accurate in every sense. St. Augustine said in the fourth century

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A.D. and Cardinal Baronius in the sixteenth century that the “Bible teaches the way to go to heaven, but not the way the heavens go.” For example, the Sacred Scriptures do not in the main contain exact chronological history or scientific explanations; these were not the author’s intention. The truth of the Bible is called “Gospel Truth”, meaning that the Bible contains the truth and nothing but the truth in matters that affect our salvation.

**The Gospel Truth:** This is where the rules of hermeneutics and the practice of exegesis come in. God speaks to us in human terms in the Bible and according to the *Catechism*, to interpret the Bible correctly we must pay close attention to the meanings that the human authors intended to convey and the message God intended to reveal with their words (No. 109). It tells in order for us to discover what the human authors’ intended to say, we must consider the times and cultures in which they lived and wrote as well as the literary genres used at the time, the manner of feeling, speaking, and narrating then prevalent (No. 110).

The Bible always tells us the truth, but we have to know what God is trying to tell us through the human author. He might not be trying to describe for us exact historical detail about a story. For example the books of Judith and Esther contain several important historical errors, but the human authors are not trying to provide us with precise historical information; they are telling stories to make points much like are found in parables or historical novels. In the instances of these and other books of the Bible, the “Gospel Truth” is the point the author is trying to make regarding morality or faithfulness or other matters.

Many have complained over the centuries that the Gospels themselves don't always contain the “Gospel Truth”. For example, some have claimed that the Gospels contain many inconsistencies or contradictions among themselves. What can you say about this?

**The Synoptic Problem:** The inconsistencies or contradictions among the Gospels have been called by biblical scholars the “Synoptic Problem.” There have been many books and articles published about this subject over the years, and the subject is far too complex to consider here in any detail. However, most of us become confused when we compare the same or similar stories in the Gospels. The stories always seem to vary slightly in terms of what, when, or where they happened. Or one Gospel might contain one story and not another. This has led some, even in early times of the Church, to claim that the Bible is not trustworthy. However, the truth of the story is not affected in any way by the fact that the Evangelists relate the words and deeds of the Lord in a different order, and express his sayings differently, as long as they preserve the sense or meaning of the stories. Although the Gospels contain a lot of historical truth, the Evangelists were not writing history in the modern sense of history. Nonetheless, early pagan writers such as Celsus and Porphyry tried to prove that Christianity was untrue because of these apparent inconsistencies and contradictions as well as other reasons. Christians such as Tertullian and especially

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Origin attempted to refute these critics, sometimes by composing Gospel harmonies that eliminated the apparent inconsistencies and contradictions. In this regard, St. Augustine wrote in the fourth century:

It is quite probable that each Evangelist believed it to have been his duty to recount what he had to in that order in which it pleased God to suggest it to his memory in those things at least in which the order, whether it be this or that, detracts in nothing from the truth and authority of the Gospel. But why the Holy Spirit, who apportions individually to each one as He wills, and who therefore undoubtedly also governed and ruled the minds of the holy (writers) in recalling what they were to write because of the preeminent authority which the books were to enjoy, permitted one to compile his narrative in this way, and another in that, anyone with pious diligence may seek the reason and with divine aid will be able to find it.

St. Augustine expended a lot of effort trying to reconcile the differences found in the Gospel accounts. The *Catechism* tells us of the written Gospels, that “The sacred authors, in writing the four Gospels, selected certain of the many elements which had been handed on, either orally or already in written form; others they synthesized or explained with an eye to the situation of the churches, while sustaining the form of preaching, but always in such a fashion that they have told us the honest truth about Jesus” (No. 126).

**Why the Bible can be so hard to understand:** Some have claimed that the Bible is easy to understand. Some Protestants claim that the Holy Spirit helps the sincere believer to properly understand the Sacred Scriptures. This is called private judgment. If this were the case, why are there so many interpretations of many passages in the Bible? On the other hand, the Catholic Church has always maintained that it wrote the Bible, especially the New Testament, and that only the Church is protected by the Holy Spirit when interpreting the Bible. But even the Catholic Church has not found it easy to interpret the Bible. There are a number of reasons for this:

- The text of the Bible might be difficult to readily understand.
- The Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew in which the Bible was originally written is often difficult to translate into modern languages.
- Modern readers often are often easily confused by ancient idioms or manners of speech used in the Bible.
- The Bible contains ancient slang terms, cultural differences, and foreign theological concepts not readily recognized by moderns.

It appears, then, that biblical scholars need to know a lot about early Middle Eastern societies to correctly interpret the Bible. This requires a considerable education and lot of hard work. For example:

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- Biblical scholars need to be able to read fluently the ancient biblical languages, such as Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, maybe even Coptic and Syriac.
- In addition, biblical scholars need a thorough knowledge of what the Church teaches about the Bible.
- Also they need to continually read many books and scholarly journals written by reputable orthodox Scripture scholars and theologians.
- Furthermore, they are required to make a thorough study of what the Church Fathers and Doctors of the Church had to say about the Bible.
- Moreover, Scripture scholars need a deep knowledge and understanding of the history of the times when the scriptures were written.
- And finally, Scripture scholars have to know a lot about archeology on biblical themes from books and scholarly articles.

### *The equal status of the Word and the Eucharist*

Since Vatican II the Church has placed equal emphasis on the Bible and the Eucharist in our worship of God. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said in this regard, “The Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic liturgy with the rites of introduction and conclusion ‘are so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship.’” Then the Holy Father says, “Let us never forget that ‘when the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel’ . . . Christ does not speak in the past, but in the present, even as he is present in the liturgical action.” Regarding the Word and the Eucharist, the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* states:

The Bible is the Word of God Jesus Christ: The Word of God: The Word of God is a name for Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Son of God. "Jesus was the Word from all eternity and the Word was God (John 1:1). The Word was made flesh and lived in our midst as God-man (John 1:14). The Word is Living and is the source of all life for men (John 1:4, 9, 13). The Word is the victorious king and ruler of the universe in the final phase of the world" (Rev. 19:13).

The *Catechism* says of the Word, “In order to reveal himself to men, in the condescension of his goodness God speaks to them in human words: 'Indeed the words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men’” (No. 101).

Elsewhere the *Catechism* tells us that “It is the same Word that we hear throughout the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments alike. Because the Word is God, the Catholic Church has always

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venerated the Scriptures equally with the Eucharist, the Body of Christ who is God.” The *Catechism* states of this fact that “She [the Church] never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body” (No 102). It continues, “For this reason, the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body” (*Catechism*, No. 103).

To stress that the Word is God and not simply a book, the *Catechism* goes on to say, “Still, the Christian faith is not a ‘religion of the book.’ Christianity is the religion of the ‘Word’ of God, a word which is ‘not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living.’ If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, ‘open [our] minds to understand the Scriptures.’” (No. 108).

Pope John Paul II writes about this theme in one of his encyclicals *Dies Domini*. In fact we discussed his ideas on this matter in this encyclical in some detail during our series on *Keep Holy the Lord's Day* on Catholic radio. According to the Pope, the Lord's Day is the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. He says that whenever Mass is celebrated, the Risen Lord is encountered in the Sunday assembly at the twofold table of the Word and of the Bread of Life. He reminds us that the Second Vatican Council said, “the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are so closely joined together that they form a single act of worship.”

In regard to the Table of the Word, the Pope says, “The table of the word offers the same understanding of the history of salvation and especially of the Paschal Mystery which the Risen Jesus himself gave to his disciples: it is Christ who speaks, present as he is in his word when Sacred Scripture is read in the Church.” Regarding the Table of the Bread of Life, he says, “At the table of the Bread of Life, the Risen Lord becomes really, substantially and enduringly present through the memorial of his Passion and Resurrection, and the Bread of Life is offered as a pledge of future glory.”

## HOW THE GOSPELS WERE WRITTEN

The Church, who was there from the beginning and whose members wrote the Gospels, tells us that the Gospels were written in three stages: The first stage is:

1. **The life and teaching of Jesus:** When Jesus ascended into Heaven he deposited his teachings (the Deposit of Faith) in his Church, the Catholic Church. Jesus instructed his disciples orally and did not write down anything himself. Therefore, his teachings existed only in the living Tradition of the Church; at this stage Jesus' teachings did not exist in written form. Of this matter, the *Catechism* states, “The Church holds firmly that the four

Gospels, whose historicity she unhesitatingly affirms, faithfully hand on what Jesus, the Son of God, while he lived among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation, until the day when he was taken up” (No. 126). To conclude, the first stage includes what Jesus Christ said and did and what the Apostles heard and saw.

Of this stage of the Gospel, the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1964 said in a document entitled *Instruction Concerning the Historical Truth of the Gospels* that “*Christ our Lord* joined to Himself chosen disciples, who followed Him from the beginning, saw His deeds, heard His words, and in this way were equipped to be witnesses of His life and doctrine. When the Lord was orally explaining His doctrine, He followed the modes of reasoning and of exposition which were in vogue at the time. He accommodated Himself to the mentality of His listeners and saw to it that what He taught was firmly impressed on the mind and easily remembered by the disciples. These men understood the miracles and other events of the life of Jesus correctly, as deeds performed or designed that men might believe in Christ through them, and embrace with faith the doctrine of salvation.”

- 2. The oral tradition:** The second stage in the writing of the Gospels is the oral tradition. The traditional way of transmitting knowledge from generation to generation in Jesus' time was by word of mouth or oral transmission. This was necessary because only a few could read or write. The teachers or Jewish rabbis instructed verbally in the schools and synagogues and their pupils learned by memorization by employing various mnemonic devices. Students would sit in a circle and sway from side to side in rhythm much as they do in Middle Eastern countries today when reciting from memory. When Jesus deposited his teachings into his Church, the Apostles, priests, and deacons taught their congregations the Faith orally. The *Catechism* says of the oral tradition, “For, after the ascension of the Lord, the apostles handed on to their hearers what he had said and done, but with that fuller understanding which they, instructed by the glorious events of Christ and enlightened by the Spirit of truth, now enjoyed” (No. 126). The Apostles developed a much fuller understanding of what they had witnessed after Pentecost

At this stage the Apostles proclaimed the death and resurrection of our Lord. The process of proclaiming the Gospel by preaching is called *Kerygma* (Greek). The Apostles used various literary forms in their preaching, including catechesis, testimonials, hymns, doxologies, prayers, genealogies, parables, miracle stories, etc. They preached what Jesus actually said and did, taking into account the level and needs of their listeners. Jesus never wrote anything down nor did he tell anyone to do so. It was only after Christianity began to spread and when the Apostles discovered that Jesus was not going to return during their lifetimes that they wrote anything down. The Pontifical Biblical Commission says of the oral tradition:

The apostles proclaimed above all the death and resurrection of the Lord, as they bore witness to Jesus. They faithfully explained His life and words, while taking into account in their method of preaching the circumstances in which their listeners found themselves. After Jesus rose from the dead and His divinity was clearly perceived, faith, far from destroying the memory of what had transpired, rather confirmed it, because their faith rested on the things which Jesus did and taught. Nor was He changed into a 'mythical' person and His teaching deformed in consequence of the worship which the disciples from that time on paid Jesus as the Lord and the Son of God. On the other hand, there is no reason to deny that the apostles passed on to their listeners what was really said and done by the Lord with that fuller understanding which they enjoyed, having been instructed by the glorious events of the Christ and taught by the light of the Spirit of Truth. So, just as Jesus Himself after His resurrection 'interpreted to them' the words of the Old Testament as well as His own, they too interpreted His words and deeds according to the needs of their listeners. Devoting themselves to the ministry of the word, they preached and made use of various modes of speaking which were suited to their own purpose and the mentality of their listeners. For they were debtors to Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and the foolish. But these modes of speaking with which the preachers proclaimed Christ must be distinguished and (properly) assessed: catecheses, stories, testimonia, hymns, doxologies, prayers--and other literary forms of this sort which were in Sacred Scripture and were accustomed to be used by men of that time.

3. **The written Gospels:** The third stage was the actual writing of the Gospels. The Apostles at first believed that Jesus would return during their lifetimes; therefore, they didn't see any need to write down his teachings; they simply taught them orally. However, as the years went by and Jesus did not return again to earth and the Gospel began to spread throughout the Mediterranean World and beyond, they decided to write them down for posterity. The Evangelists committed to writing the oral tradition. To again quote the Pontifical Biblical Commission:

This primitive instruction, which was at first passed on by word of mouth and then in writing—for it soon happened that many tried to compile a narrative of the things which concerned the Lord Jesus—was committed to writing by the *sacred authors* in four Gospels for the benefit of the churches, with a method suited to the peculiar purpose which each (author) set for himself. From the many things handed down they selected some things, reduced others to a synthesis, (still) others they explicated [explained] as they kept in mind the situation of the churches. With every (possible) means they sought that their readers might become aware of the reliability of those words by which they had been instructed. Indeed, from what

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they had received the sacred writers above all selected the things which were suited to the various situations of the faithful and to the purpose which they had in mind, and adapted their narration of them to the same situations and purpose. Since the meaning of a statement also depends on the sequence, the Evangelists, in passing on the words and deeds of our Saviour, explained these now in one context, now in another, depending on (their) usefulness to the readers (*Instruction Concerning the Historical Truth of the Gospels*, Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1964).

## GUIDELINES FOR READING AND INTERPRETING SACRED SCRIPTURE

The Church has given us guidelines with which to properly interpret the Bible, which follows:

- **Be attentive to content and unity of the entire Bible:** In this regard, the *Catechism* states, “Be especially attentive 'to the content and unity of the whole Scripture. Different as the books which comprise it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God's plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart, open since his Passover” (No. 112). A proper interpretation of Scripture requires that the reader consider the historical, geographic, ethnic, linguistic, and other factors.
- **Read the Bible within the living tradition of the Church:** The *Catechism* says to “Read the Scripture within 'the living Tradition of the whole Church. According to a saying of the Fathers, Sacred Scripture is written principally in the Church's heart rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God's Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture (according to the spiritual meaning which the Spirit grants to the Church” (*Catechism*, No. 113). What this means is the text must be understood over the lifetime of the Church. The Church was there from the beginning and guided by the Holy Spirit only it knows how to interpret Scripture and define doctrines in accordance with God's intention.
- **Be attentive to the Analogy of Faith:** The *Catechism* tells us to, “Be attentive to the analogy of faith. By analogy of faith we mean the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation” (*Catechism*, No. 114). An analogy points to, resembles, is similar to, or is comparable to something else. Jesus used analogies in many parables. He often compared things in the Kingdom of Heaven. For example: the Sower (Matthew 13); the king who wished to settle accounts with his servants (Matthew 18:23-35); the wise man who built his house upon a rock (Matthew 7:24-27); the king who gave a marriage feast for his son (Matthew 22:1-14); and the householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16).

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Whenever a question of doctrine emerges, the Church always looks to the teachings that already exist to make certain that the answers provided resemble, are similar to, or comparable to the existing doctrines. The analogy of Faith provides boundaries within which Scripture can be properly understood and minimizes the practice of making wild speculations about the meaning of passages.

It should be remembered that these guidelines are not only for laypersons, but for theologians and Scripture scholars as well.

## THE FOUR SENSES OF SCRIPTURE

Edward Sri, a prominent Scripture scholar that teaches at Benedictine College in Kansas, says that “Understanding the four senses of Scripture provides an interpretive key for unlocking many spiritual treasures in the Word of God. They can help one make vital connections between the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Catholic Faith, and individual spiritual life. With this approach, we see more clearly that the events and people mentioned in the Bible are intimately linked to our own Christian lives and serve as models for us to follow” (*Making Sense Out of Scripture: The Four Best Kept Secrets in Biblical Studies Today*, Catholics United for the Faith).

Humans communicate primarily through words and actions; however, God communicates not only through his words and actions, but also through his creation. Since he is the Creator and in control of everything, God communicates not only through the words of the Bible, but also gives special meaning to the persons, things, and events described in the Bible. God uses these persons, things, and events as signs that point to and tell us something about his plan for the salvation of the world. The human author might not even be aware that God has inspired him to write what he has written.

Regarding the senses of Scripture, the *Catechism* states, “According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church” (No. 115).

Pauline A. Viviano, Associate Professor of Theology at Loyola University in Chicago, writes in a fine article “The Senses of Scripture” that the Church has a rich tradition of interpreting Sacred Scripture”. She states that:

That tradition had begun already in the New Testament, as the Old Testament was interpreted in relationship to Christ, and it was further developed by the early Church Fathers

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and systematized in the medieval period. Though modern and contemporary biblical scholarship both have adopted ‘new means and new aids to exegesis’ as encouraged by Pope Pius XII, the foundation laid by the early Church Fathers and the medieval Church continues to support subsequent inquiries into the meaning of the biblical text. The early Church Fathers were not bound to one meaning of the text but rather allowed the biblical text to speak its message in various ways. These various ways correspond to the levels of meaning in a text; these levels of meaning we call the senses of Scripture.

Professor Viviano adds:

The fourfold senses of Scripture—the literal, allegorical, moral (tropological), and anagogic senses—were first proposed by John Cassian (ca. 360-435). By way of example, Cassian wrote, “The one Jerusalem can be understood in four different ways, in the historical sense as the city of the Jews, in allegory as the Church of Christ, in anagoge as the heavenly city of God ‘which is the mother of us all’ (Gal 4:26), in the tropological sense as the human soul.” St. Augustine set forth a similar fourfold division in *De Genesi ad litteram*: “In all the sacred books, we should consider eternal truths that are taught, the facts that are narrated, the future events that are predicted, and the precepts or counsels that are given” (1.1). The exegetes of the medieval period seem to have taken these statements as programmatic for interpretation. Though some spoke of as many as seven senses of Scripture, it became commonplace to refer to the fourfold senses of Scripture. A simple poem attributed to Augustine of Dacia captures the medieval commitment to the four senses of Scripture: “The letter teaches events; allegory what you should believe; morality teaches what you should do, anagogy what mark you should be aiming for.” In the medieval period there were some, such as Hugh of St. Victor and his followers, who leaned toward a more literal interpretation; others, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, leaned toward a more spiritual interpretation. More often, though, these various senses of Scripture were set side by side; and all of them were seen as viable, even if very different, ways in which to understand the biblical text.

### *The Literal Sense of Scripture*

There are two basic senses of Scripture: the literal sense and the spiritual sense. Literal literally means word for word. It also conveys the idea of a description of actual events (events that really happened as described). The *Catechism* states in this regard, “The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal” (*Catechism*, No.116). Viviano says of the literal sense:

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The literal sense refers to the sense of the words themselves; it is “that which has been expressed directly by the inspired human authors.” It has been variously described as the verbal or grammatical sense, the plain sense, the sense the human author intended, the sense the divine author intended, the historical sense, and even the obvious sense. Underlying these various descriptions is the notion that “the literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture.” The literal sense is discovered by careful and attentive study of the biblical text using all interpretive tools available, such as grammatical aids, archaeological evidence, historical and literary analyses, sociological and anthropological studies, and whatever else can be called upon to expand one’s knowledge of the historical and literary context of the text and thereby gain a better understanding of the literal sense of the biblical text.

Viviano tells us that “the importance of the literal sense was long ago underscored by St. Thomas Aquinas in his recognition that ‘all the senses are founded on one—the literal—from which alone can any argument be drawn, and not from those intended in allegory.’ This importance was reiterated in Pope Pius XII’s exhortation to Catholic biblical scholars: ‘let the Catholic exegete undertake the task, of all those imposed on him the greatest, that namely of discovering and expounding the genuine meaning of the Sacred Books. In the performance of this task let the interpreters bear in mind that their foremost and greatest endeavor should be to discern and define clearly that sense of the biblical words which is called literal.’”

From a literal point of view the Bible means what it says and says what it means. However, in accordance with what was said above about the difficulty of interpreting the Bible, interpreting the Bible (exegesis) is not easy, because human authors wrote for audiences of their day and not directly for us today. Repeating what we said above about this matter, the Bible can be hard to understand because the text might not be readily understood; the original languages (usually Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew) of the texts are often difficult to translate into modern languages; modern readers often are confused by idioms long since abandoned; and finally ancient slang terms, cultural differences, and foreign theological concepts can make the Bible hard to understand.

The Bible should be read in accordance with the inspired authors intention and not in accordance with our own views. Recall that we said above that reading one’s own meaning into the biblical text is called eisegesis. Although the authors wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, social, psychological, philosophical, cultural, linguistic, historical, and other factors come in to play when properly interpreting what they wrote.

God’s Word is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow; it is always the same; however, the difficulty of interpretation comes in because God must rely on human authors who were affected by the societies in which they lived, their psychological makeup, their philosophical orientations,

the cultures or way of life that surrounded them, the languages in which they spoke and wrote, and the historical circumstances in which they were a part. Knowledge of these things is necessary to know what the human authors intended to convey to their audiences.

### *The Spiritual Sense of Scripture*

The literal sense gives rise to the spiritual senses of Scripture. Viviano informs us that the spiritual sense refers to when what is signified by the words of a text—the literal sense—also has a further signification. She says:

[A]s it developed within Christianity, the spiritual sense pertained to “the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it.” Spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament was especially prominent for the Church Fathers, for the Old Testament was believed to contain God’s preparation for his Son. The early Church Fathers used many terms to refer to the spiritual meaning of the text, such as allegorical sense, mystery or mystical sense, and *theoria*. The lines between these various terms are blurred, and their meanings often overlap. Indeed, at times these terms were used interchangeably by the early Church Fathers. By the medieval period, three distinct spiritual senses emerged: the allegorical sense (which included typology), the tropological or moral sense, and the anagogic or future sense. The allegorical sense refers to the meaning that is hidden beneath the surface of the text. The search for the allegorical meaning of texts finds its origin in the Greek world, especially in Platonic philosophy as it was understood in the Hellenistic period.

**The allegorical sense of Scripture:** An allegory is a method of indirect representation of ideas or truths, especially in literature or art. It is a literary form that tells a story in order to present a truth or enforce a moral. The allegorical sense describes how those things, events, or persons in the literal sense point to Christ and the Paschal Mystery. The *Catechism* says in this regard of the allegorical sense of Scripture, “We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ’s victory and also of Christian Baptism” (No. 117). Allegory has an underlying meaning. Typologies are outstanding biblical examples of the use of allegory. The types (persons, places, or events) that occur in the Old Testament that foreshadow or prefigure or point to greater things to happen in the New Testament (antitypes) are allegories. The types in the Old Testament are sources that find their fulfillment in the New Testament.

Usually the inspired writers of the Old Testament didn’t know that what they were writing referred to greater events than the more immediate events they were describing, but the Apostles, Evangelists, and other early Christians looking back on the Old Testament discovered allegories

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in the form of prophecies of which Christ was the fulfillment. They saw most prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Jesus Christ as Messiah only after the Resurrection. It was the claims that Jesus made of himself fulfilling prophecies found in the Old Testament that gave them clues to search for more prefigurations of him in the Old Testament (For example, see Luke 4:19-21 where Jesus states he is fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah in Isaiah 61:1).

Viviano informs us that the allegorical interpretation was employed to make sense of the Greek myths in which the gods often appeared crude and their behavior immoral. She states:

Underlying the allegorical method is the notion that the writers of an earlier age composed their works in a veiled language. They wrote one thing but intended another. In order to hold on to the stories of old, and yet to allow these stories to speak to a new age, it is necessary to find a meaning beyond what the written word said. In order to uncover the true meaning of those ancient myths, it is necessary to treat the written word as a symbol for a deeper reality; it is necessary to find a deeper meaning below the surface or literal meaning of the text. By means of allegorical interpretation, truth is unveiled; where there was mystery now stands revelation. Like the ancient Greek myths, many passages in the Jewish Scriptures are obscure or seemingly inconsistent, or the content of the passage is seen as unacceptable when judged by the standards of a later age. Use of the allegorical method to interpret the Bible in the early Church could explain away its inconsistencies, the questionable behavior of its characters, and its crudeness.

**Philo of Alexandria:** The greatest proponent of allegorical method of interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures was Philo of Alexandria. He was a first century Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria, in the Roman province of Egypt. He used philosophical allegory in an attempt to fuse and harmonize Greek philosophy with Jewish philosophy. He followed both Jewish exegesis and Stoic philosophy as his methodology. His work attempts to combine Plato and Moses into one philosophical system. He developed an allegoric approach of interpreting the Holy Scriptures, in contrast to literal approaches. His identification of Plato's ideas with the Creator's thoughts no doubt influenced several of the early Church Fathers. The *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states of Philo:

When Hebrew mythical thought met Greek philosophical thought in the first century B.C.E. it was only natural that someone would try to develop speculative and philosophical justification for Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy. Thus Philo produced a synthesis of both traditions developing concepts for future Hellenistic interpretation of messianic Hebrew thought, especially by Clement of Alexandria, Christian Apologists like Athenagoras, Theophilus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and by Origen. He may have influenced Paul, his contemporary, and perhaps the authors of the Gospel of John and the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the process, he laid the foundations for the development of Christianity in the

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West and in the East, as we know it today. Philo's primary importance is in the development of the philosophical and theological foundations of Christianity.

B. Reed Hamil writes in a fine essay entitled “Origen and John Chrysostom and their Exegeses of Genesis 1 as Examples of the Alexandrian and Antiochene Schools of Interpretation of the Early Church’s Hermeneutics”:

Though Philo’s rules were not original to him, he was a key player in later Christian allegorical exegesis. Several of his rules were: allegory is necessary if the text says something “unworthy of God”; if it self-contradicts; if it is actually allegorizing; when certain expressions are repeated unnecessarily; when ‘superfluous words are used’; when known facts are repeated; when synonyms are used; when there is a play on words; when an expression is out of the ordinary; and when there are grammatical anomalies. Eventually, the Christian population in Alexandria rose and they applied Philo’s hermeneutic to Christian Scriptures.

Although his allegorical exegesis was important for several Christian Church Fathers, Philo has barely been recognized by Rabbinic Judaism, because they had little or no interest in philosophy. He believed that literal interpretations of the Hebrew Bible would stifle humanity's view and perception of a God too complex and marvelous to be understood in literal human terms. According to the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

In his search for the deeper significance of the text, Philo identified biblical characters with abstract virtues or with the soul in its journey through life. Names, numbers, measurements, and seemingly mundane details were explored for their hidden meaning and given cosmic or mystical significance. The allegorical method of Philo of Alexandria was influential in the development of Christian allegorical interpretation. Allegorical interpretation is already found in the New Testament. For example, Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians says, For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by a freeborn woman. The son of the slave woman was born naturally, the son of the freeborn through a promise. Now this is an allegory. These women are two covenants. One was from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; this is Hagar. . . . But the Jerusalem above is freeborn, and she is our mother. (Gal 4:22-26) The allegorical method of interpretation dominated in the early Church from the time of Clement of Alexandria (150 to 211/215 CE) through the fourth century. Origen, living in the 3rd century CE, is perhaps the greatest representative of this kind of interpretation.

**The moral sense of Scripture (tropological):** The moral sense also goes under the name of the tropological sense. The word is from a literary device called tropes, which means figurative language, and applied to morals is a method of considering or interpreting Scripture in a figurative, moralistic way rather than in a literal sense. It derives from Latin *tropus* or Greek

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*tropos*, which means a figure of speech. The Bible contains a lot of moral content; guidelines for right living. The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written “for our instruction.” (*Catechism*, No. 117). The *Catechism* states, “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord” (DV 21): both nourish and govern the whole Christian life. ‘Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’” (No. 141). The moral sense describes how the literal sense points to the Christian life in the Church.

According to Viviano, the tropological sense and the anagogic sense, are defined in terms of their focus. She states, “The tropological sense is concerned with the moral lessons that can be drawn from the biblical text. If events in Israel’s past ‘were written down to instruct us’ (1 Cor 10:11), then we can learn how we ought to live by paying careful attention to the history of Israel, the words of the prophets, and the exhortations found in Israel’s wisdom traditions—indeed, to the entire Bible.”

**The anagogical sense of Scripture:** The great catechist and theologian, Fr. Hardon, S.J. defines the anagogical sense as, “Teachings of the Bible that relate to or lead to eternal life, including blessings hoped for and related to that future life, e.g., Jerusalem in its anagogical sense typifies the Church Triumphant” (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*). In other words, the anagogical sense deals with our final destiny and the last things: death, judgment, Purgatory, Heaven, and Hell. Viviano says of the anagogical sense, “The anagogic sense represents a shift in focus to the future, specifically to the end times or last things. It looks to the goal of our journey through life as we are ‘led up’ to our heavenly home.”

The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, literally contain hundreds of foreshadowings or pre-figurations. According to Edward Sri, the classic example of demonstrating the four senses of Scripture is the study of the temple in Jerusalem. Using the fifth century Church Father John Cassian’s analogy of the Temple in Jerusalem, Sri states that, “In the literal sense, the temple was the actual building that once stood in Jerusalem. Actually the temple went through four phases: Moses’ tent or tabernacle that attended the Israelites in the wilderness and brought to Jerusalem by David; Solomon’s temple; Ezekiel’s temple, and Herod’s temple. There, the Israelite priests offered sacrifice, the people worshipped, and God dwelt in the Holy of Holies. This temple of the Old Testament has greater importance because God uses it as a sign to reveal important realities in the New Testament: Jesus and the Christian life.

Recall that the spiritual sense has historically been broken down into the allegorical, moral or tropological, and anagogical senses. In regard to the allegorical sense, Sri says that “the temple points to Jesus, Who said He was the true temple which would be destroyed and raised up in three days (Jn. 2:19-21). Just as the Jerusalem temple was the place of sacrifice for the Jews, so does

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Jesus body house the everlasting sacrifice on Calvary for all humanity.” He goes on to say that, the tropological or moral sense of Scripture “is found in the Christian, whose body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Just as the temple contained the awesome presence of God, so do the bodies of Christians hold the presence of the Holy Spirit by virtue of their Baptism.” He is here, of course, referring to the indwelling Trinity.

Finally, in the anagogical sense “the Jerusalem temple finds its eschatological [the end things] meaning in the heavenly sanctuary, where God will dwell among us in our eternal home, as described in Book of Revelation, especially the famous passage in the Book of Revelation 21:22, which states, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

The use of the senses of scripture is primarily a Catholic practice. Although some Protestant Scripture scholars utilize the spiritual senses of Scripture in their exegesis or interpretation, most stay closer to the literal sense. Sri tells us that this method of investigating the four senses in a Scriptural text is rooted in Catholic Tradition, and Fathers and Doctors of the Church, saints, the Evangelists and other New Testament writers, and even Jesus himself used this method of interpreting Sacred Scripture. Of this practice Sri says, “Jesus often viewed people and events of the Old Testament as signs which point to him and shed light on his mission and who he was. For instance, he refers to Jonah and the whale as prefiguring his own death and resurrection. Since Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so did Jesus spend three days and three nights in the tomb” (Matthew 12:40-41). Recall the story in Luke 24 of Jesus walking with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. They had not yet heard of Jesus’ resurrection and were downcast because of the sad events of the past few days. Jesus approached them, but he kept them from recognizing him. He asked them what they were talking about, and one of them asked him where he had been the past few days. Then he went on to tell Jesus about Jesus of Nazareth who had been a great prophet, but that the chief priests delivered him up to be crucified, dashing any hope that they had had that he was the messiah. Jesus told them they were foolish for not believing all that the prophets had spoken and reminded them that the Christ had to suffer these things before he could enter into his glory. Then as they walked the seven miles toward Emmaus Jesus recounted the many places in the Scriptures concerning himself. When they finally got to the village, it was evening, so they asked Jesus to stay with them and while breaking and blessing the bread at supper they recognized him and he disappeared before their eyes.

**Why the four senses of Scripture are so important to understanding the Bible:** To point out why understanding the four senses of Scripture is so important to us, Sri states, “Discovering the connections between the Old Testament, Christ, and the Christian life shows the continuity in God's plan of salvation. We see more clearly that from the very beginning from Adam and Abraham to Moses and the prophets, God has been preparing humanity for Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church.” He says

[T]hat's why studying the Old Testament is so important for understanding Jesus and many aspects of the Catholic Faith. Take, for example, the Old Covenant Passover lamb. In the literal sense, the paschal lamb was eaten by Israelite families as the central part of the yearly Passover meal, which commemorated Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. But the spiritual senses show how God used that lamb as a preparation for understanding Jesus on the cross as the true paschal sacrifice and for understanding the Eucharist as the true Passover meal of the New Covenant, through which God delivers us from the spiritual bondage of sin . . . . [The] connections between the Old and the New, between the past, present and future are not arbitrary. They are rooted in history according to the plan of God. In other words, the four senses of Scripture uncover the way things really are by revealing the great unity in God's salvific plan as carried out in history (*Making Sense Out of Scripture: The Four Best Kept Secrets in Biblical Studies Today*).

What Sri says about the four senses of Scripture is so important that we will quote him at length again. He states:

No doubt, understanding the four senses of Scripture will transform your reading of the Bible. By using this Catholic approach to the Word of God, you can more easily overcome the distance of time and discover the intimate solidarity that exists between the people of God in the Bible and your life in the Catholic Church today. With the four senses in mind, the Biblical narratives become much more than stories from the ancient past. Whether reading the accounts about Abraham, the temple or the flood, these age-old Biblical narratives can no longer be seen as far removed and detached from our lives today. Instead, they are intimately bound up with the present. As we saw above, the Passover is not merely a Jewish feast with little significance for Christians. Rather, it has become the essential backdrop for understanding the Eucharist. Similarly, as many spiritual writers have shown, Israel's testing in the wilderness for 40 years is a model for the trials and purifications in the spiritual desert or dark night of the Christian life.

Here he is, of course, referring to St. John of the Cross' *Dark Night of the Soul*. He goes on to say, “Finally, the baptismal liturgy proclaims how the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan River are not only instruments of redemption for the Israelites under Moses and Joshua, but also serve as

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preparations for understanding the truly redemptive waters of Baptism” (*Making Sense Out of Scripture: The Four Best Kept Secrets in Biblical Studies Today*).

To summarize his point about the senses of Scripture, Sri quotes the *Catechism* that quotes a medieval couplet that aptly summarizes the significance of the four senses: “The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith; The Moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny” (*Catechism*, No. 118).

Jesus himself frequently used the senses of scripture. He read the Scriptures (the Old Testament) utilizing the senses of Scripture, especially those that made reference to him as the Messiah, as did the Evangelists, the Apostles, the Fathers of the Church, the Doctors of the Church, and theologians and Scripture scholars until the sixteenth century. Afterwards Humanists, Protestants, and Modernists rejected this approach to understanding the Bible and replaced it with so-called scientific methods of biblical scholarship.

## TPOLOGY IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

Typology is the study of the unity of the Old and New Testaments. Scott Hahn defines a type as “a real person, place, thing, or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows [or prefigures] something greater in the New Testament” (*Hail, Holy Queen*, Scott Hahn, p.23). In other words, a type is something in the Old Testament that points to something in the New Testament. The *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* states that “Many of the persons in the Old Testament are ‘types’ of Christ, e.g., Adam (Rom. 5:14); and things in the Old Testament are types of things in the New Testament. Thus, Noah's Ark is a type of the Church (1 Pet. 3:20 ff.). That which a type prefigures is called the antitype. The fact that a particular person or thing is a type can be known only by revelation, either from Holy Scripture or from tradition.”

The *Catechism* says in regard of typologies, “The Church, as early as apostolic times, and then constantly in her Tradition, has illuminated the unity of the divine plan in the two Testaments through typology, which discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son” (No. 128). Therefore, “Christians . . . read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen. Such typological reading discloses the inexhaustible content of the Old Testament; but it must not make us forget that the Old Testament retains its own intrinsic value as Revelation reaffirmed by our Lord himself. Besides, the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old” (*Catechism*, No. 129). The *Catechism* concludes typologies by stating, “Typology indicates the dynamic movement toward the fulfillment of the divine plan when God [will] be everything to everyone” (*Catechism*, No. 130).

**Foreshadowing or Prefiguration of the New Testament in the Old Testament:** Another word for prefiguration or foreshadowing is hint at or point to. For example, the Ark of the Covenant of the Old Testament foreshadows (or hints of) the Virgin Mary of the New. The Passover Lamb of the Old Testament prefigures the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” of the New Testament, Jesus Christ. The Adam and Eve of the Old Testament are types that hint of the New Adam (Jesus) and the New Eve (Mary) of the New Testament (Romans 5:14-19). In this example Jesus and Mary are antitypes of our first parents who by their disobedience lost man’s place in God’s family. Mary and Jesus regained man’s place in God’s family by their obedience. Noah’s Ark, which saved people from the waters of the flood, prefigures the waters of Baptism, which under the New Covenant saves Christians from spiritual death (1 Peter 3:20-21). The Church Fathers identified the relationship between the Exodus and Baptism. In the same manner that the Israelites escaped from slavery in Egypt by passing through the waters of the Red Sea on their way toward the Promised Land, so by passing through the waters of Baptism are Christians freed from the spiritual bondage of sin and death on their journey to Heaven. The Old Testament contains literally hundreds of types that hint of greater things to come in the form of antitypes in the New Testament. Following are a number of examples of typing.

- **Adam and Eve:** They are types of Jesus and Mary. Jesus is the New Adam and Mary is the New Eve who gained for us by their obedience what the Old Adam and Eve had lost by their disobedience.
- **Abel:** He was the first person to foreshadow the crucifixion. He is often depicted in Christian art as a shepherd, and is often shown offering a lamb in sacrifice, which prefigures the Lamb of God whom takes away the sins of the world.
- **Mary:** There are many references in the Old Testament to Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ, that prefigure her role in the redemption of humankind in the New Testament (Gen. 3:15; Is. 7:14; Jer. 31:22). Furthermore, the Church has said from the beginning that Moses’ Ark of the Covenant foreshadows the Blessed Virgin Mary who is the New Ark of the New and Everlasting Covenant. To explain what this means, the Ark was a box that was several feet in dimension that was made of acacia wood and was covered both inside and out with the purest gold. At the four corners golden rings were placed through which gilded poles were passed, enabling the Ark to be carried. On the lid at the top were statues of two golden Cherubim or angels, each bearing large golden wings. The Ark contained three items: the stone tablets on which was written the Ten Commandments; a golden pot of manna, the bread provided by God to the Israelites during their forty years in the wilderness; and Aaron’s budding rod, a symbol of his right to the office of High Priest, which prefigures or hints at the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. To connect this to Mary, Moses’ Ark contained the Word of God in stone; the New Ark—the womb of Mary—contained the Word

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of God incarnate. In regard to the other items in the Ark, the manna symbolized bread for nourishment of the body, whereas the New Ark, Mary's womb, contained the Word Incarnate to provide the "Bread of Life, to nourish the soul in the Eucharist.

- **The Flood:** The Flood symbolizes the waters of baptism, as did the cloud and the crossing of the Red Sea. Eight people were saved by Noah's Ark. The Ark prefigures the Church (1 Peter 3:20), because the waters of baptism are offered to save all of humanity.
- **Noah's Ark:** Noah's Ark is a type of the Church (1 Pet. 3:20).
- **The Chosen People, the Hebrews:** The covenant that God made with the patriarch Abraham marked the origin of that Chosen People to whom the Church of Christ, the Catholic Church, would always refer as its spiritual ancestor.
- **Moses:** Moses, who liberated the Chosen People from the bondage of the Egyptians, prefigures Jesus, the New Moses, who liberates the People of God from the bondage of Satan and sin. The *Catechism* says that Moses is one of the greatest figures fore-shadowing Christ, the Savior and Mediator between God and man.
- **The Exodus:** The *Catechism* tells us that "The exodus is commemorated by the Jewish people at Passover, which for Christians is a foreshadowing of the Passover of Jesus Christ from death to life and is celebrated in the memorial of the Eucharist."
- **Crossing the Red Sea:** The water of the sea is a symbol of death and represents the mystery of the cross. The *Catechism* says that this symbolizes, which signifies Baptism and communion with Christ's death. It says that crossing of the Red Sea, symbolizes the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, announcing the liberation wrought by Baptism."
- **Melchisedech:** St. Paul develops the figure of Melchisedech as a type of Christ, the eternal High Priest of the New Covenant. Unlike the Levitical priests, Melchisedech is given no genealogy in Scripture. Paul sees in this fact the intention of the Holy Spirit to prefigure Christ's eternal priesthood (Heb. 7:1-10).
- **David:** In his kingship of Israel he foreshadowed the spiritual kingship of Christ and in many of his psalms he prophesized Christ, the King of Kings.
- **The Paschal Lamb:** The Paschal Lamb of the Israelites of the Old Testament pre-figures the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sins of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ, of the New

Testament, the New and Everlasting Covenant. Jesus takes the place of the Paschal Lamb of the Old Testament or Covenant.

- **The Messiah:** There are many places in the Old Testament that prefigure or point to the Messiah. For example, Isaiah has numerous prophecies that refer to Jesus Christ, especially Isaiah 11 and 53.
- **The Jewish Priesthood and Sacrifices:** The Jewish priesthood organized in an hierarchical manner, and the Jewish liturgical ceremonies, especially the Passover sacrifices, all prefigure the Catholic Sacrifice of the Mass, priesthood, hierarchy, and liturgy. Of this matter, the *Catechism* says, “The Old Testament bears eloquent witness to the communal worship that Yahweh expected of his people. He made extensive provision for sacred rites and determined the regulations to be observed by the Israelites in rendering him the honor he ordained. He established a variety of sacrifices and designated the exact ceremonies with which they were to be offered him. His prescriptions on such matters as the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple, and the holy days were minute and very clear. He established a sacerdotal tribe with its high priest, and specified and described the vestments with which the sacred ministers were to be clothed (Lv. 24:1-8). All of this, however, was a foreshadowing of the worship that the high priest of the New Covenant was to render to his heavenly Father and in which he wished those who believe in his name to join as members of the Christian community.”
- **The Temple:** The temple prefigures Christ's own mystery. The *Catechism* states that when he announces its destruction, “it is as a manifestation of his own execution and of the entry into a new age in the history of salvation, when his Body would be the definitive Temple” (No. 593). I believe that the *Catechism* is here referring to the story told in John 2 where Jesus drove the moneychangers and merchants from the Temple during his first visit to Jerusalem for the Passover. The Jewish leaders asked by what right did he do this, and he answered, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews responded by saying, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But John tells us that Jesus is here speaking “the temple of his body”.
- **The Promised Land and Jerusalem:** In the Old Testament God gives the Israelites the Promised Land and Jerusalem for fulfilling the covenant, while in the New Testament God promises a Heavenly Jerusalem for those who love and serve him.
- **The Passover:** The Mass of the New and Everlasting Covenant is prefigured in the Passover of the Old Covenant.

- **The Trinity:** In regard to the Trinity, the *Catechism* says that “In the light of this revealed vision of the eternal society of persons who are the Godhead, it becomes more understandable why Christ should have so insisted on the unity among his followers being patterned after the unity which he and the Father and Holy Spirit possess among themselves. It also becomes more intelligible why the Fathers of the Church saw a foreshadowing of the Trinity in God's statement in Genesis, “Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves” (Gn. 1.26). By implication, therefore, mankind is made to the image and likeness of God twice over: once in being like God, and unlike lesser creatures, because we have an immortal spirit, which is able to think and choose; and once again because, like God, we are individual persons, indeed, but capable of living in communion with other persons as a loving society.”
- **Types of Christ:** In addition to Adam, Melchisedech, Moses, and David, many other persons in the Old Testament, such as Elijah, are 'types' of Christ.
- **Jonah and the Whale:** The story of Jonah and the fish in the Old Testament offers an example of typology. In the Old Testament Book of Jonah, Jonah told his shipmates to sacrifice him by throwing him overboard. Jonah explained that due to his own death, God's wrath would pass and that the sea would become calm. Subsequently Jonah then spent three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish before it spat him up onto dry land. Typological interpretation of this story holds that it prefigures Christ's burial, the stomach of the fish representing Christ's tomb: as Jonah exited from the fish after three days and three nights, so did Christ rise from His tomb on the third day. In the New Testament, Jesus invokes Jonah in the manner of a type: "As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Luke 11:29–32 (see also Matthew 12:38–42, 16:1–4). Jonah called the belly of the fish "She'ol", the land of the dead.
- **Sacrifice of Isaac:** Genesis Chapter 22 brings us the story of the preempted sacrifice of Isaac. God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac to Him, cited as foreshadowing the crucifixion of Jesus. When a suspicious Isaac asks his father “where is the lamb for the burnt offering” Abraham prophesied “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And indeed a ram caught by its horns awaited them, which is also seen as a type for Christ, the lamb that God provides for sacrifice crowned by thorns.
- **Joseph and his brothers:** Genesis Chapters 37-50 has the story of Joseph in Egypt.

Joseph is commonly cited as a Christ type in the story. Joseph is a very special son to his father. From his father's perspective Joseph dies and then comes back to life as the ruler of Egypt. Actually Joseph's brothers deceive their father by dipping his coat in the blood of a sacrificed animal. Later Joseph's father finds that not only is Joseph alive but he also is the ruler of Egypt that saves the world of his day from a great famine. Other parallels between Joseph and Jesus include, both are rejected by their own people, both became servants, both are betrayed for silver, both are falsely accused and face false witnesses. Additionally, both attain stations at the "right hand" of the respective thrones (Joseph at Pharaoh's throne and Christ at the throne of God), and both provided for the salvation of gentiles (Joseph a physical salvation in preparing for the famine, while Christ provided the deeper spiritual salvation). Finally, Joseph married an Egyptian wife, bringing her into the Abrahamic lineage, whereas Christ's relationship with the church is also described in marriage terms in the New Testament.

There are literally dozens, even hundreds more, of types and prefigurations in the Old Testament, which hint of greater things in the New Testament. St. Jerome, who carefully studied and translated the Bible into Latin during the fourth century A.D., saw the Church of God foretold in many places in the Old Testament. "Did not practically every one of the illustrious and sainted women who hold a place of honor in the Old Testament prefigure the Church, God's Spouse? Did not the priesthood, the sacrifices, the solemnities, nay, nearly everything described in the Old Testament shadow forth that same Church? How many Psalms and Prophecies he saw fulfilled in that Church?"

The New Testament also contain many prefigurations, for example:

- **The multiplication of the loaves:** This story is told in John 6 where Jesus connects the multiplication of the loaves and fishes with the Bread of Life sermon the following day in the synagogue at Capernaum. By miraculously multiplying the bread, which was given for the nourishment of the body, Jesus prefigured the heavenly food of the soul, which he was to give to humankind on the day before he suffered at the Last Supper. The multiplication itself prefigure the superabundance of this unique bread of his Eucharist.
- **The Magi:** The *Catechism* says of the Magi: "Because of this pilgrimage to Bethlehem, the Magi Kings from the East became the beginning and the symbol of all those who, through faith, reach Jesus, the Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, the Savior nailed to the cross, he who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, taken down from the cross and buried in a tomb at the foot of Calvary, rose again on the third day. These very men, the Magi Kings, three according to tradition, from the East, became the begin-

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ning and the prefiguration of all those who, from beyond the frontiers of the Chosen People of the Old Covenant, have reached and still reach Christ by means of faith."

There are many other prefigurations or foreshadowings in the New Testament that hint at greater things to come.

### ***History of the use of typology***

Fr. Hardon explains allegory as "A long or complicated story with an underlying meaning that differs from the literal or surface meaning. The greatest biblical allegory is the Cantic of Canticles." He states that the allegorical sense is a "Form of biblical interpretation. An actual accomplished fact is understood to be a figure of something else. The literal meaning is expressed in a sustained metaphor. Commonly applied to giving a mystical explanation to any part of the Bible" (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*).

On the other hand, a biblical type is "A biblical person, thing, action, or event that foreshadows new truths, new actions, or new events. In the Old Testament, Melchizedech and Jonah are types of Jesus Christ. A likeness must exist between the type and the archetype [antitype], but the latter is always greater. Both are independent of each other. God's call for the return of the Israelites from Pharaoh's bondage typifies the return of Jesus Christ from his flight into Egypt. In the New Testament the destruction of Jerusalem, foretold by Christ, was the antitype of the end of the world."

**The early Church:** Professor Viviano informs us that today scholars make a distinction between allegorical and typological interpretation, but that such a distinction was not made in the early Church. She states in this regard:

The early Church Fathers spoke of "types," but they did not distinguish between allegory and typology as scholars have recently begun to do. What is distinctive to typology is the notion that what preceded Christ was but a shadow of what was to come. Persons and events of the Old Testament are understood to be "types" of persons or events in the New Testament, which are then "antitypes." The Old Testament, interpreted typologically, is said to anticipate or to foreshadow events to come. The crossing of the Red Sea is seen as a type of Baptism; Isaac carrying the wood for his sacrifice in Genesis 22 is seen as a type of Jesus' carrying his cross to Calvary. Some representatives of typological interpretation are Diodorus of Tarsus, St. John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Typology is found in the exegetical work of St. Augustine and St. Jerome alongside allegorical interpretation. Allegorical interpretation gave the early exegetes a way to find meaning in the Bible, including its obscure and unseemly passages; but because of this method's focus on the

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deeper spiritual meaning of a text, the literal sense became viewed as insignificant. Typological interpretation, by contrast, maintained a greater respect for the literal sense because this method of interpretation is more firmly grounded in the literal sense of the text.

She continues:

Allegorical interpretation gave the early exegetes a way to find meaning in the Bible, including its obscure and unseemly passages; but because of this method's focus on the deeper spiritual meaning of a text, the literal sense became viewed as insignificant. Typological interpretation, by contrast, maintained a greater respect for the literal sense because this method of interpretation is more firmly grounded in the literal sense of the text. Both typology and allegory, however, went beyond the literal sense of the text in the early Church. For typologists the written word pointed beyond itself; for allegorists the written word stood for something else. Both typology and allegory, however, went beyond the literal sense of the text in the early Church. For typologists the written word pointed beyond itself; for allegorists the written word stood for something else.

**Typology and allegory in the early Church Fathers:** More than one school of interpretation develop in the early Church. In fact, at first there were several schools, but by the middle of the third century two major schools of biblical interpretation dominated: one at Alexandria, Egypt; and the other at Antioch, Syria. The Alexandrian school was founded around 150 A.D. and Antiochene school about a century later.

### *The Alexandrian School*

The earliest leaders of the Alexandrian School were Origen, and Clement of Alexandria. Later St. Athanasius and St. Cyril of Alexandria became leading biblical interpreters of this school. Alexandria became a leading center of the allegorical or spiritual method of biblical interpretation and sought a harmonization between Greek culture and Christian faith. By allegorical is meant a literary form that tells a story to present a truth or to enforce a moral point of view. An allegorical interpretation is a symbolic interpretation. Although the Church Fathers of this school taught that much of the Bible was to be interpreted literally, they also detected a deeper allegorical or spiritual meaning to much of the text. Furthermore, the Alexandrian Church Fathers were advocates of what has come to be known as High Christology, which stresses the importance of Christ's divinity over his humanity. Moreover, Alexandria became a center of opposition to heresy, especially during the fourth century Arian heresy. St. Athanasius was the greatest Alexandrian champion of orthodox Christianity against this heresy.

Origen was the greatest of the Alexandrian teachers and scholars. He tended to emphasize the

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spiritual meaning over the more literal or historical meanings of biblical texts. Because the Bible has both human and divine authors, it is logical to look for spiritual or mystical meanings as well as literal meanings. Origen found it difficult in linking Old Testament prophecies about Israel to the Christian Church by using a strictly literal approach to interpreting the Bible, so by applying a mystical sense to the text it was easier for him to explain away what appeared to be inconsistencies and contradictions within the Bible. However, scholars have said that at times Origen appears to downplay the literal meaning of a text too much at the expense of the literal. He is especially known for his *Hexapla*, which placed side-by-side six versions of the Old Testament, including the second century Greek translations of Aquila of Sinope and Symmachus the Ebionite. Some of the Alexandrian Fathers, including Origen, carried mystical or symbolic interpretations of Sacred Scripture to highly exaggerated lengths; for example, one of the Fathers believed that the portholes in Noah's Ark signified the sacraments.

Origen of Alexandria, in his *Treatise on First Principles*, recommends that the Old and New Testaments be interpreted allegorically at three levels, the first being the “flesh”, the second the “soul”, and the third the “spirit”. Many of the events recounted in the Scriptures, interpreted in the literal or “fleshly” sense, Origen claims, don’t make any sense. He believed that many of the laws of the Old Testament, when interpreted literally, are impossible or nonsensical. He argued that to get at the meaning of these passages, it is necessary to interpret them allegorically. Some connected passages will contain parts that are literally true and parts that are literally impossible. In this case, says Origen, “the reader must endeavor to grasp the entire meaning, connecting by an intellectual process the account of what is literally impossible with the parts that are not impossible but historically true, these being interpreted allegorically in common with the part which, so far as the letter goes, did not happen at all.”

Second, Origen was educated in a tradition of spiritual exegesis that began with the Jewish community in Alexandria, who used the method to demonstrate that their Scriptures were compatible with Greek philosophy. The leading Jewish proponent of this movement was Philo, and although his work eventually fell out of favor with the Jews, it was accepted enthusiastically by Christians and was probably communicated to Origen through Clement. One source states “Hence, Origen inherited a strong belief in allegory as a tool to communicate the deepest and most profound philosophical and theological truths as well as the assumption that the Bible, the inspired Word of God, must be subject to such allegorical interpretation in order to grasp its spiritual significance.”

Origen’s writings are replete with allegorical Scripture interpretations, particularly in his commentaries and homilies. For instance, one source states:

[I]n his 27<sup>th</sup> homily on the book of Numbers, he describes growth in the spiritual life based

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on the 42 stopping places of Israel in the wilderness mentioned in Numbers 33. He begins by asking why the Lord wanted Moses to write this passage down: “Was it so that this passage in Scripture about the stages the children of Israel made might benefit us in some way or that it should bring no benefit? Who would dare to say that what is written ‘by the Word of God’ is of no use and makes no contribution to salvation but is merely a narrative of what happened and was over and done a long time ago, but pertains in no way to us when it is told?”

Another example is found in Origen's eleventh homily on Joshua, which deals with the five kings who attack Gibeon in chapter ten and end up hiding in the cave at Makkedah after the Lord's lengthening of the day and the destruction of their armies by Israel. Origen states:

Now these five kings indicate the five corporeal senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell; for it must be through one of these that each person falls away into sin. These five senses are compared to those five kings who fight the Gibeonites, that is, carnal persons.” As to their choice of refuge: “That they are said to have fled into caves can be indicated, perhaps, because a cave is a place buried in the depths of the earth. Therefore, those senses that we mentioned above are said to have fled into caves when, after being placed in the body, they immerse themselves in earthly impulses and do nothing for the work of God but all for the service of the body.”

Now that we have completed discussing the school at Alexandria, let's consider the school at Antioch.

### *The Antiochene School*

The School of Antioch, Syria was founded by Lucian around 260 A.D. Although they were not totally opposed to a prudent use of spiritual interpretations of the Bible, the Antiochene Church Fathers were highly skeptical of the allegorical system of interpretation practiced by the Alexandrian Fathers. Instead they emphasized the literal interpretation of the Bible, paying more attention to the exact words, facts, and dates of the text than did the Alexandrians. Moreover, the Antiochene Fathers placed more emphasis on Jesus' humanity than his divinity. The School flourished during the fourth to sixth centuries and its most prominent theologians included Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrillus, and St. John Chrysostom, who is considered one of the greatest preachers of all time and the author of commentaries on Matthew and John that, I understand, are still relevant today.

Unfortunately this school—perhaps because it did not stress a higher or deeper meaning to Scripture, or lost the connection of texts with apostolic tradition—also produced some confusing

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ideas, such as the Christological interpretation of Theodore of Mopsuestia, which seemed to posit the existence of two persons in Christ, and which ultimately led to the heresy of Nestorius in the fifth century. Nonetheless, in the final analysis the spiritual approach to interpreting the Bible of the Alexandrian school prevailed for the next thousand years.

Other great Greek and Latin Fathers tried to combine the valid insights of both schools in their writings. For instance, Saint Augustine, who was the greatest theologian and philosopher of the Early Church, applied the allegorical method in his homilies, but in his theological writings he adhered to the literal meaning. Saint Gregory of Nyssa also used both methods. St Augustine was the dominant influence in Catholic theology and biblical scholarship until the time of the Reformation.

**Examples of spiritual and literal interpretations of Genesis:** Hamil provides us with a comparison of Origen's spiritual interpretation of the Book of Genesis with St. John Chrysostom's literal interpretation as a test case. Of Origen he says:

The lights of the sky are a beautiful story to Origen. The sun is Christ himself, the great source of light, the light of the world. The church is the moon, which creates no light of its own, but reflects that of the Son. The stars "in the heaven of our heart" are those who pleased God: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and countless others. The light from Christ is given to the church, and therefore to its inhabitants. For him, "just as the sun and the moon enlighten our bodies so also our minds are enlightened by Christ and the Church.

Of Chrysostom he writes:

The sun ever performs its duty to awaken man to his work. The focus is on the sun's giving and taking, its provision of heat and the drying of the earth. While it is praise-worthy, it is nothing compared to God, reprimanding them for attending the horse races rather than coming to the daily worship gathering, which "Pagan peoples" have failed to grasp. The sequence proves God's power, that vegetation precedes the sun, which nourishes it, and Chrysostom compares this to a farmer who works the ground: the farmer has no power to make the plants grow, but God can cause plants to thrive without even the sun. The action of the heavenly bodies to designate time shows how God makes useful all things for man.

Regarding the fifth day by Origen:

Though he mentions the "creeping creatures" alongside the birds above, they will be treated with vv. 24-31, when they are created. First, the birds are more concerned with the sky; spiritually, the birds are good thoughts which come from the heart, being more caught up in heavenly things. They are the impulses to perform acts of righteousness. Second, the

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“great whales” are those “impious thoughts and abominable understandings which are against God.” They are related to the sea, which is distinct and separate from the earth and its fruit. Third, he notes that the text reads, “God saw” instead of “God said they were good,” taking this to mean he saw their usefulness, despite their highly negative significance.

Regarding the fifth day by Chrysostom:

That God’s word and his word alone brought forth living things is, in Chrysostom’s eyes, an opportunity to point out what he believes to be an absurdity: “Yet there are some stupid people who, despite this kind of teaching, are rash enough to withhold belief, and do not admit that these visible things have a creator.” It is because God saw they were good that they are inherently valuable. Chrysostom attacks those who “find fault with their creation.” They are good for man because they teach him of God’s power and grace. Next, the earth, which brought forth vegetation, now brings forth land-dwelling creatures. There is an abundance in God’s work, and it is for his good as much as our own that he makes them.

Both the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools were influenced by Jewish scholarship, but the Jewish influence upon Alexandrian Christianity was from heterodox Jewish scholarship such as Philo, who was not a traditional Jew, whereas the Antiochene school was influenced by more traditionally minded Jewish scholarship. For instance, St. Jerome under the influence of his traditionally oriented Jewish teachers in Hamil’s words “turned from allegorization to an increasing respect for the literal meaning of Scripture. And it is likely that wherever the influence of the synagogue was felt by the church the interpretation of scripture had a tendency toward literalism.” He writes:

Such was the case at Antioch. For centuries the Jewish community [in Antioch] was prominent and influential. The earliest Antiochene exegesis which we possess, an interpretation of Genesis by Theophilus of Antioch, is derived largely from Jewish teachers. One of the key elements within the Antiochene tradition is its consistent attack upon Alexandrian allegory. Grant makes note of this: “Another adherent of the [Antiochene] school, Diodorus of Tarsus, composed a book called *What is the Difference Between Theory and Allegory*. Theory,’ as we shall see, is the true meaning of the text as the Antiochenes understand it.” Simonetti places Diodorus<sup>21</sup> as “the real beginning of the school,” giving less prominence to Lucian of Antioch (who is said to have founded the school, but the evidence surrounding him is scant). Antioch, in short, rejected allegory entirely. The historical-literal sense was primary, but included a christocentric interpretation, which often accommodated and made up for any sort of historical errors and confusion. Particularly concerning the reading of prophecies, the prophets’ predictions were at the same time both historical and christocentric. The Antiochenes argued that the double sense was different and distinct from that which the allegorists superimposed upon an original

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literal meaning. Diodore argued that the messianic or prophetic meaning did not depreciate the literal meaning but rather was grounded upon it.

**The Middle Ages:** Although during the Middle Ages, some referred to as many as seven senses of Scripture, Viviano claims that it became commonplace to refer to the fourfold senses of Scripture. A simple poem attributed to Augustine of Dacia that we quoted above in a different translation states: “The letter teaches events; allegory what you should believe; morality teaches what you should do, anagogy what mark you should be aiming for.” She informs us that there were some during the medieval period, such as Hugh of St. Victor and his followers, who leaned toward a more literal interpretation, whereas others, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, leaned toward a more spiritual interpretation. More often than not, “these various senses of Scripture were set side by side; and all of them were seen as viable, even if very different, ways in which to understand the biblical text.”

**The Protestant Reformation:** The Reformation brought with it a different interpretive focus. Luther and subsequent reformers moved away from allegorical interpretation, and began to emphasize the literal interpretation of Scripture. Within Catholicism the emphasis was still on the fourfold senses of Scripture.

**The Enlightenment** Moving into the eighteenth century Enlightenment, professor Viviani states that, “reason was enthroned as the ultimate criterion of knowledge, and interpretive methods began to change. Authority and tradition were called into question, and scientific method began to dominate all fields of inquiry. The explosion of knowledge that accompanied the emergence of science, coupled with archaeological discoveries, raised critical questions about the factual and scientific accuracy of the Bible.”

**The Historical-Critical method:** The eighteenth century also witnessed the emergence of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation. The Church had earlier opposed the use of the method, because it had been developed and used by liberal Protestant theologians and Scripture scholars from the early nineteenth century to provide “naturalistic, empirical, and evidentiary explanations for what is written in Scripture.” As a consequence, Catholic scholars hardly practiced the method, and those who did usually got into trouble with the Church.

The Historical-Critical method had been used in other fields, and now scholars were applying it to the Bible. The problem was, because of their skeptical mentality, these scholars were coming up with interpretations far different than the traditional ones. Many, if not most of them, concluded that the Jesus of History was not the same Jesus found in the Gospels, that the Jesus of History was not the same as the Christ of Faith described in the Bible. In fact, they argued that naive people at best and deceivers at worst, that is, the Evangelists and St. Paul, had transformed

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the Jesus of History into the Christ of Faith. They maintained that a later generation of Christians had written the New Testament, who were Christians who had not been eyewitnesses to the events they describe. Consequently, they projected their own needs and desires into their story when describing the teachings and actions of Jesus. Not believing in the possibility of miracles or fulfilled prophecies, they explained away Jesus' miracles in naturalistic or mythological terms. One scholar says that “Along with this recovery of the true Jesus of history, the Old Quest carried with it the implicit assumption that the theology of the church should change to correct itself in light of this new historical revelation.

Because many Scripture scholars, especially Protestant Scripture scholars, who employed the Historical-Critical method in the nineteenth century held premises that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Church was not favorable to Catholic scholars employing the method until well into the twentieth century when it became evident that the method could be of considerable value in more deeply understanding the Scriptures.

The Historical-Critical method emerged in the eighteenth century and has dominated the field of Biblical interpretation since. The Historical-Critical method is not one method; it employs several methods in an attempt to interpret the Bible from within its historical and literary context and in a search for the meaning intended by the authors. The method attends to the history of the text and its formation from earlier oral and written sources; it discusses its forms and its redaction. It enlists the aid of many disciplines, such as linguistics, archaeology, sociology, anthropology, literary theory, and comparative religions, to try to determine the meaning of a passage in its historical and literary context. Those using this method have challenged many presuppositions about the historical reliability of the biblical text and the formulation of doctrines that are biblically based. As Historical-Critical method moved into the academy and began to dominate in Protestant seminaries, fundamentalism arose to insist upon the inerrancy of Scripture in every area of knowledge and to hold on to the fundamentals of Christian faith as they had been previously defined. The Historical-Critical method is discussed in more detail below.

**In Catholic circles:** Viviano goes on to explain that in the early part of the twentieth century, biblical scholars began to discuss the fuller sense (*sensus plenior*) of Scripture. “The fuller sense is defined as a deeper meaning of the text, intended by God but not clearly expressed by the human author.” She states:

This fuller sense is to be found when a later biblical author confers on an earlier text a new meaning, such as Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 (Mt 1:23) to refer to the virginal conception of Jesus; or when a meaning is given to a biblical text by later doctrine or conciliar definition, such as the definition of original sin based in Romans 5:12-21. 15 The distinction between the fuller sense and the spiritual sense is difficult to maintain, but it is said to stand between the literal sense and the spiritual sense. The fuller sense allows the literal meaning

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to stand but maintains that the text acquired a new meaning after Christ. The fuller sense of a text, though intended by God, was not seen until the fullness of Revelation had been realized in Christ. The discussion of the fuller sense continues, but it has been largely eclipsed by the adoption of the historical-critical method within Catholic circles in the middle of the twentieth century. Pope Pius XII published *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943, authorizing the use of contemporary biblical methods of interpretation: [She quotes the pope as saying]: As in our age, indeed new questions and new difficulties are multiplied, so by God's favor, new means and aids to exegesis are also provided.... Let the interpreter then, with all care and without neglecting any light derived from recent research, endeavor to determine the peculiar character and circumstances 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. (no. 33)

Pope Pius's position was reaffirmed at Vatican II in the document *Dei Verbum*<sup>1</sup> and again in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. Viviano concludes:

From the time of the early Church Fathers through the medieval period, to the modern world, and now into the contemporary age, biblical interpretation has grown and developed, with each successive age applying the best of the hermeneutical<sup>18</sup> principles of its time to determine the meaning of Sacred Scripture. The language of "senses of Scripture" is not used by contemporary biblical scholars; and though those using historical-critical method have often insisted that a text has only one meaning, there is a growing recognition that there are multiple layers of meaning in a text. Contemporary biblical scholars who employ historical-critical methods stress what the text meant in its historical and literary context, but with the Bible we are dealing with a living text that continues to have meaning for the faith communities that hold it sacred. As such, we must attend not only to what the text meant, but also to what the text means for the believing community. We continue to move between the literal and spiritual senses of the text as we struggle to appropriate what God's Word has to say to us today.

## COMPARISON OF CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT BIBLES

There are some differences between the Catholic and Protestant versions of the Bible. Catholic Bibles contain all the Old Testament books that have been traditionally accepted by Christians since Jesus' time. They contain seven more Old Testament books (46) than do Protestant Bibles (39). Catholics call these seven books deuterocanonical (second canon). The deuterocanonical books include Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and parts of Esther and Daniel. When examining the question of what books were originally included in the Old Testament canon, it is important to note that some of the books of the Bible have been known by more than one name. Sirach is also known as Ecclesiasticus, 1 and 2 Chronicles as 1 and 2 Paral-

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pomenon, Ezra and Nehemiah as 1 and 2 Esdras, and 1 and 2 Samuel with 1 and 2 Kings as 1, 2, 3, and 4 Kings that is, 1 and 2 Samuel are named 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Kings are named 3 and 4 Kings.

The Catholic Old Testament of 46 books follows the Alexandrian canon (named after Alexandria, Egypt) of the *Septuagint*, the Old Testament that was translated into Greek around 250 B.C. by seventy Jewish scholars (from which it gets its name) for an Egyptian Ptolemaic pharaoh. Ample evidence exists to prove that the Apostles and early Christians used the *Septuagint*. St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate, for many centuries the official Catholic Bible, includes the same books as the *Septuagint*, although he translated the Old Testament not from the Greek, but rather from Hebrew and Aramaic texts.

### *The Septuagint*

Since the Apostles and early Christians used the *Septuagint*, what does this tell us about this translation of the Old Testament? To explain this, we have to go back to a couple of centuries before Christ. At the end of the second or third century B.C., probably all of the Jews living in Palestine who spoke Aramaic and those scattered throughout the Mediterranean world who spoke Greek recognized all of the books of the Old Testament as canonical. However, during the last century before Christ and the first century after Christ, the Jews of Palestine eliminated a number of books from the existing collection as not in harmony with the Law of Moses, therefore of doubtful inspiration. These books are the deuterocanonical books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and parts of Esther and Daniel. Later on, these books were called deuterocanonical, that is, "belonging to the second canon", because they are found only in the Christian canon; the others were called protocanonical that is, "belonging to the first canon", because they had been retained both in the Jewish and the Christian canon.

There is a tradition that the *Septuagint* translation of the Old Testament was made in the third century before Christ to meet the religious needs of the Jews of Alexandria in Egypt. The story according to a letter of a certain Aristeas to his brother Philocrates that in the year 320 B.C., Ptolemy II Philadelphus the Macedonian King of Egypt, captured Jerusalem and carried off 200,000 Jews to Egypt. The captives settled in Alexandria and the neighboring districts. Many others followed them into voluntary exile. I've read that after this up to as many as two-thirds of the population of Alexandria was Jewish. As time went on the Alexandrine Jews gradually forgot how to speak and read their native tongue and adopted the Greek language. They needed a Greek translation of the Scriptures if they were to practice their religion and follow their law properly.

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In order to satisfy this need, tradition has it that the Egyptian Pharaoh Ptolemy Soter, or, Ptolemy Lagi, who reigned from 305-285 B.C. asked the High Priest in Jerusalem to send scholars to Alexandria to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek for his Jewish subjects. As tradition has it, seventy or seventy-two Jewish scholars were sent to make the translation. The name of the translation derives from the Latin *Septuaginta*, which means the work of the seventy. It is reported that they first translated into Greek the five Books of Moses, the *Pentateuch* or Torah, meaning Law. The name *Septuagint* was later applied to the other books of the Old Testament as they were gradually translated during the next hundred years or so. Scholars believe that the translation was completed by 130 B.C. The translations were made in Koine Greek, which was unofficially a first or second language in the Roman Empire and was the language of the common people.

Whether this story is entirely accurate is not known, but it is natural that after a while some men at least would have undertaken to compile a Greek Translation of the *Pentateuch*, and then to translate the entire Old Testament into Greek. There is no historical record of who performed the translations and when they did so. I understand that an examination of the text shows that, in general, the authors were not Palestinian Jews called to Egypt and that differences of terminology, method, etc. clearly prove different persons translated the different books. Whatever the case, most biblical scholars believe that the *Septuagint* is a reliable translation from the original Hebrew and, in addition to the Alexandrian Jews, many Greek-speaking pagans obtained knowledge of divine revelation from the *Septuagint*, which prepared them for the preaching of the Gospel when the time came. The Apostles and other early Christian missionaries made use of the *Septuagint* in their preaching and writing.

The *Septuagint* version of the Old Testament was used by Christians at the time of Christ. The Greek version spread quickly throughout the countries in which Greek was spoken and it was used by different writers as well as replacing the original Hebrew text in liturgical services. The philosopher Philo of Alexandria used it in his writings and considered the translators as inspired Prophets. Eventually even the Jews of Palestine began to use it. For example, Josephus, the Palestinian Jewish historian, used it in his writings. Also, we know that the New Testament writers made use of the *Septuagint*, because most of their citations were from it. Furthermore, the *Septuagint* became the Old Testament of the Church and was so highly esteemed by the early Christians that several writers and Fathers declared it to be inspired. Moreover, the Christians constantly used it in their controversies with the Jews. By the middle of the first century A.D., the Jews of Palestine rejected the *Septuagint* in favor of the Hebrew text, such as those of Aquila and, Theodotion, partly because they detected imperfections in the Greek text and partly because the Christians had taken it over. Christians had taken it over by applying dozens, even hundreds of typologies, connecting the Old and New Testaments, something of which the Jews rejected.

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No doubt copyist and editing errors, deliberate or not, did creep in over the years as the Old Testament was diffused among the Hellenizing Jews and several Christians tried to make critical corrections, such as made by Origen and Lucian.

It has been claimed that the older the versions of the Bible, the more likely they are to be accurate. In regard to the Old Testament, the three best manuscripts of the *Septuagint* known are the Vatican, *Codex Vaticanus* (fourth century); the Alexandrian, *Codex Alexandrinus* (fifth century), now in the British Museum, London; and the Sinai, *Codex Sinaiticus* (fourth century), found by Tischendorf in the convent of St. Catherine, on Mount Sinai, in 1844 and 1849, now part at Leipzig and in part in St. Petersburg. Of course, these versions of the Bible also contain the New Testament books.

The *Codex Vaticanus* is the most accurate of the three, because it is based on the most ancient Hebrew text, whereas the *Codex Alexandrinus* borrows a lot from Origen's *Hexapla* text and the Hebrew *Masoretic* text. Origen's *Hexapla* placed side-by-side six versions of the Old Testament, including the second century Greek translations of Aquila of Sinope and Symmachus the Ebionite. The *Masoretic* Text is the Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible (*Tanakh*). It was primarily copied, edited and distributed by a group of Jews known as the Masoretes between the seventh and tenth centuries A.D. It defines not just the books of the Jewish canon, but also the precise letter-text of the biblical books in Judaism, as well as their vocalization and accentuation for both public reading and private study. The MT is also widely used as the basis for translations of the Old Testament in Protestant Bibles, and in recent decades also for Catholic Bibles.

In regard to the New Testament, compared with other existing ancient documents, we possess a large number of manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts of the New Testament that were written very close to the time of the original documents (at least 5,000). The existing manuscripts of most ancient classical stories were written many centuries after the original compositions. In addition, scholars claim that the New Testament that we possess today is over 99% free of textual discrepancies, putting no major Christian doctrines in doubt. In other words, a comparison with the current New Testament with the oldest available manuscripts shows few textual discrepancies, proving that very few copyist or editorial errors exist in modern editions. The criteria used by the early Church to determine which documents should be considered inspired by the Holy Spirit and free from doctrinal error have ensured that we possess the most accurate records about Jesus.

In summary, the *Septuagint* Version of the Bible is important to us for several reasons: First, the *Septuagint* is the most ancient translation of the Old Testament available and consequently is invaluable to biblical scholars for understanding and correcting the Hebrew text. Scholars tell us that many errors such as textual corruptions, additions, and omissions must have crept into the Hebrew text between the third and second centuries B.C. and the sixth and seventh centuries A.D.;

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therefore, the manuscripts used by the *Septuagint* translators might have been better than the later Hebrew Masoretic manuscripts.

A second reason the *Septuagint* version is so important to us is that its acceptance by the Alexandrian Jews, and then other Greek-speaking countries, helped to spread the expectation of the Messiah among the Gentiles. Also, it introduced to the Greek-speaking world the theological terminology that made it a most suitable instrument for the propagation of the Gospel of Christ.

Another reason for the importance of the *Septuagint* is that the Jews recognized it long before the Christian era, and so during Christ's time it was recognized as a legitimate text. Even the Jewish rabbis of Palestine came to use the *Septuagint*, so it was natural that the Apostles and Evangelists used it and borrowed Old Testament citations from it, especially in regard to the prophecies. Moreover, the Church Fathers and the other ecclesiastical writers of the early Church drew upon it. Early Christians held the *Septuagint* in high esteem and some even believed it to be inspired.

The last reason why the Septuagint is so important to us is it is the official text in the Greek Church, and the ancient Latin Versions used in the western Church were made from it, such as the *Italia*. Even the names of the books of the Pentateuch and other Old Testament books derive from the Septuagint: such as the names Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Hebrew versions named these books after the first word in the text, instead of the meaning of the book. St. Jerome used the names of the books found in the Septuagint in his Latin Vulgate translation.

### *The Apocrypha*

Now that we have discussed how the *Septuagint* translation of the Old Testament came to be, let's examine why there are differences between the Catholic and Protestant Bibles. Martin Luther and other Protestant Reformers in the sixteenth century eliminated the deuterocanonical books from Protestant Bibles, because they didn't consider them inspired. Protestants refer to the rejected books as apocrypha, from the Greek word meaning secret or not canonical, whereas Catholics refer to early Christian writings, many of them heretical, not included in the New Testament as apocrypha.

Examples of apocryphal Gospels include: *The Gospel of Thomas; The Gospel of Peter; The Gospel of Philip; The Gospel of Truth; The Gospel of the Egyptians; The Gospel of the Hebrews; The Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)*. Examples of Acts include: *The Acts of Peter; The Acts of John; The Acts of Paul; The Acts of Andrew; The Acts of Peter and the Twelve; Acts of Peter and Paul; The*

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*Acts of Thomas; Acts of Pilate (Gospel of Nicodemus); Epistles include: Epistle of the Apostles; Epistle of Barnabas; Apocalypses include: The Apocalypse of Peter; and the Apocalypse of Paul.*

**Books rejected by Luther:** Other than Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and parts of Esther and Daniel, Luther had doubts about the canonicity of other Old Testament books as well. He was not content even to let the matter rest there, and proceeded to cast doubt on many other books of the Old Testament that Protestants accept as canonical. One scholar tells us, “He considered Job and Jonah mere fables, and Ecclesiastes incoherent and incomplete. He wished that Esther (along with 2 Maccabees) ‘did not exist’, and wanted to ‘toss it into the Elbe’ river. Once he had set himself as his own pope, there were no limits to which he would go to interpret Scripture in a manner that satisfied his fancy.”

Why did Luther and Protestants reject some books of the Catholic Canon? In other words, why do Protestants erroneously classify apocryphal a number of books which the Catholic Church accepts as part of the Canon of the Bible? Beginning with Luther, Protestants rejected the deuterocanonical books mainly because they did not support some of their new doctrines. For example, the book of Maccabees supports the doctrine of Purgatory and prayers for the dead (Tobit 12:12, 2 Maccabees 12:39-45. 2 Maccabees 12:46 says, “It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.”; intercession of dead saints (2 Maccabees 15:14; Revelation 6:9-10), and intermediary intercession of angels (Tobit 12:12,15; Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4), all of which Protestants had rejected. The Protestant Canon of the Old Testament is identical with the present Jewish Canon.

Other reasons that Luther and some of the Reformers rejected the deuterocanonical books as canonical is that they contain nothing prophetic, and that Jesus and the Apostles didn’t quote from them. Biblical scholars tell us that this is easily disproved by a careful examination of the texts themselves. Moreover, another reason the Protestant reformers rejected the deuterocanonical books is that around 100 A.D., the Jews in Palestine refused to accept the Alexandrian canon, believing that some of the books of the new translation were not inspired. The Jews first objection was that the *Septuagint* was written in Greek, which after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. seemed un-Jewish, or even anti-Jewish. Also, the fact that Christians were using the *Septuagint* led Jews to deny the value of some of its books, especially any books that clearly foreshadowed the coming of Christ. Luther and others accepted this reasoning, probably because they suited their doctrinal positions.

Even though the deuterocanonical books were eliminated from the Protestant canon, they still were widely maintained separately in the back of Protestant Bibles. For instance, John Wycliffe, considered a forerunner of Protestantism, included them in his English translation and even Luther himself kept them separately in his Bible. Ulrich Zwingli and the Swiss Protestants also

kept them in their Bibles as did the Church of England, that is, the Anglicans. The English *Geneva Bible* (1560) and *Bishop's Bible* (1568) both included them. Even the *Authorized*, or *King James Version* of 1611 contained the *Apocrypha* as a matter of course. Even up until today, many Protestant versions of the Bible include the deuterocanonical books, even though they don't give them full canonical status.

Although they don't consider them inspired, the main reason they maintain them is because they believe they contain good spiritual and moral advice. Nonetheless, there is strong evidence that the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament were considered canonical long before the life of Christ. As we said above, they were included in the *Septuagint* from the third century B.C., which was the Alexandrian Bible used by the Apostles, who, of course were Jews. They usually quoted the Old Testament Scriptures (in the text of the New Testament) from the *Septuagint*. Furthermore, almost all of the Church Fathers regarded the *Septuagint* as the standard form of the Old Testament. The deuterocanonical books were in no way differentiated from the other books in the *Septuagint*, and were generally regarded as canonical.

St. Augustine thought the *Septuagint* was apostolically sanctioned and inspired, and this was the consensus in the early Church. Moreover, many Church Fathers, such as St. Irenaeus, St. Cyprian, and Tertullian cite these books as Scripture without distinction. Others, mostly from the east (for example, St. Athanasius, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, and St. Gregory Nazianzus) recognized some distinction between the deuterocanonical books and the other books, but nevertheless still customarily cited the deuterocanonical books as Scripture. St. Jerome, who translated the Hebrew Bible into Latin (the *Vulgate*, early fifth century), was an exception to the rule. We must add that the Church has never held that individual Fathers are infallible; it is only when they are in complete agreement on a matter that the Church considers them infallible.

**St. Jerome and the Latin Vulgate:** St Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damasus in 382 to revise the Old Latin text of the four Gospels from the best Greek texts. He was a very scholarly man and had been the Pope's secretary. Up to that time, there had been several Latin translations in use, of which the so-called *Itala* was the most popular. It was translated from the Greek and dates back to the second century. This version of the Bible was unsatisfactory in many respects. By the time of Damasus' death in 384 Jerome had completed this task as well as a more hasty revision from the Greek *Septuagint* of the Old Latin text of the Psalms. We don't know for sure which other New Testament books he might have translated, although we have read that he translated the Epistles of St. Paul, but if he did, little of it survives in the present day *Vulgate*.

After Pope Damasus died in 384, Jerome came close to being elected his successor. But he had enemies who forced him out of Rome in 385, and after travels in the Middle East he eventually settled in Bethlehem, where he produced a new version of the Psalms, translated from Origen's

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earlier *Hexapla* Greek text. He also appears to have undertaken further new translations of other *Septuagint* books into Latin; but again, these are not found in the *Vulgate* text. However, from 390 to 405 he began to translate directly from the original Hebrew texts, and translated anew all 39 books in the Old Testament, including an additional third version of the Psalms, which survives only in a very few *Vulgate* manuscripts.

St. Jerome considered some of the books of the Greek *Septuagint* to be apocryphal. In his prologues to the books, he described those books or portions of books in the *Septuagint* that were not found in the Hebrew texts as being non-canonical and called them *apocrypha*, meaning that their inspiration was questionable. In spite of this, the *Septuagint* remained, the standard Old Testament of Greek-speaking Christians. Eventually, later editions of Jerome's Latin *Vulgate* was to include these books as canonical.

Why did St. Jerome leave out some books of his Old Testament translation? While living in Palestine, St. Jerome became very friendly with various Jewish Scripture scholars and was very much influenced by them. In fact, I believe he learned Hebrew from them. Consequently, after his move to the Holy Land, he preferred to base his translation of the Old Testament on the Hebrew Bible with which most Christians were unfamiliar, rather than on the familiar Greek *Septuagint*. This preference affected not only his translation of Old Testament books, but also his view of the Old Testament canon. In other words, his translation presented an entirely new Latin translation of the Old Testament based on the ancient Hebrew text, which contained only 39 books.

As we discussed above, the *Septuagint* contained several books that are not in the Hebrew Bible. The rabbis of Palestine did not regard as inspired the books in the *Septuagint* that were not also found in the Hebrew Bible. Eventually, all Jews accepted this view and abandoned Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Tobit, Judith, Baruch, and First and Second Maccabees. Jerome's view corresponded to that of the rabbis. He called these "extra books" and although he believed they might edify Christian readers, the Church should not use them as a source for formulating doctrine. St. Augustine opposed Jerome on this issue and his view was to prevail at the Councils of Hippo in 393 A.D. and Carthage in 397 and 419 A.D. Centuries later the Council of Trent merely reaffirmed more strongly what had already been decided many centuries earlier, and which had never been seriously challenged until the onset of Protestantism.

In its fourth session the Council of Trent declared the *Vulgate* to be the authentic or official Latin version, and the one to be used in public in the Western Church. The Council said, "the *Vulgate* is in substantial conformity with the original sacred text particularly in its expression of those truths of faith and morals which contribute in any way to the knowledge of God as man's supernatural end, and of the means of attaining that end." Looking at it from a practical point of view, the Fathers at Trent probably accepted the *Septuagint* of 46 books mainly because the Protestant

## UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

Reformers chose to accept only the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible. That is why the Old Testament read by Catholics contains seven more books than the Protestant Old Testament. Jerome's translation gradually became the only Latin version of the Bible used in the Western Church, and for this reason it was known as the Vulgate, meaning "disseminated". The full name of the Vulgate in Latin is *versio vulgata*, which means simply "the published translation". Over time, all of the deuterocanonical books were incorporated into the Vulgate.

There is other evidence that the Catholic Church always considered the deuterocanonical books to be canonical. Further proof that the Catholic Canon is valid is that the earliest Greek manuscripts of the Old Testament, such as *Codex Sinaiticus* (fourth century), and *Codex Alexandrinus* (c.450) include all of the deuterocanonical books mixed in with the others and not separated. The practice of collecting these books into separate units or chapters dates back no further than 1520, an innovation of Protestantism to more easily find citations in the Bible. Later even verses were added. Nonetheless, Catholics have always considered the deuterocanonical books to be canonical, or inspired by the Holy Spirit.

## THE CANON OF THE BIBLE

The term canon has come up several times during our discussions. The term canon means rule, norm, or guideline, and in this context means which books belong in the Bible and which do not. In other words, the canon of the Bible is those books the Catholic Church decided are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Regarding the canon the *Catechism* states, "It was by the apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings are to be included in the list of the sacred books. This complete list is called the canon of Scripture. It includes 46 books for the Old Testament (45 if we count Jeremiah and Lamentations as one) and 27 for the New." (No. 120).

### *The New Testament Canon*

The New Testament is identical in Catholic and Protestant Bibles, although as discussed above, Luther did reject some of the New Testament books, because they didn't square with some of his doctrinal notions. For example, because he regarded them as non-apostolic, he rejected from the New Testament Canon the books of Hebrews, Jude, Revelation, and James, which he called an "epistle of straw" because he didn't like James's stress on the efficacy of good works. He taught that one is saved by faith alone, *Sola Fides* in Latin. Regarding the book of Revelation, he said, "Christ is not taught or known in it." I understand that these opinions are found in Luther's Prefaces to biblical books, including his German translation of 1522. In his German translation of the New Testament he placed these books at the end as an *Apocrypha*, although the other

reformers later restored them in the canon of the New Testament. Consequently, the Protestant New Testament is identical to the Catholic New Testament.

Some of the New Testament books considered by Luther to be uninspired were also considered so by some of the early Church Fathers. For example, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of St. James, the Second Epistle of St. Peter, the Second and Third Epistles of St. John, the Epistle of St. Jude, and the Apocalypse of St. John or Revelation, were not universally accepted in the early Church as canonical. Their inspiration was disputed by some Fathers of the Church and defended by others. But before the end of the fourth century the canonicity of all the books of the New Testament was accepted in both the Eastern and the Western Church.

**How the New Testament canon was developed:** Probably the best source with which to explain this matter is Fr. Henry G. Graham's *Where We Got the Bible: Our Debt to the Catholic Church*. Graham was an early twentieth century Scottish convert to Catholicism who became a priest and a bishop. He tells us:

[B]y the end of the first century A.D. written Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament were being read aloud on Sundays at Holy Mass to Christian congregations scattered around the Roman Empire and beyond. However, they were still single books and had not yet been compiled together and combined with the Old Testament into a separate volume that we now call the Bible. The first major attempt by the Catholic Church to determine the Canon of Holy Scripture was at the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D. followed by the Council of Carthage in 397 . . . There is evidence that collections of writings existed prior to the Council of Carthage in 397, because many Church Fathers and Doctors and other writers in the first three centuries mention by name various Gospels and Epistles . . . [W]e have lists compiled by St Athanasius, St Jerome, St Augustine, and many other great authorities of what were considered inspired books of the New Testament in their time and as we approach nearer to 397, the year that the canon was first established, some refer even to collections already in use.

He goes on to say that "It is a fact of history that the Council of Carthage, which was held in 397 A.D., mainly through the influence of St Augustine, settled the Canon or Collection of New Testament Scriptures as Catholics have them now and decreed that its decision should be sent on to Rome for confirmation." He concludes by saying, "The Council of Carthage, then, is the first known to us in which we find a clear and undisputed catalogue of all the New Testament books as we have them in Bibles now." He adds, "The list, or Canon as it is officially called, remained the same until the sixteenth century when Martin Luther and other Protestant Reformers changed it" (See Chapter IV, "The Church Compiles the New Testament," *Where We Got the Bible: Our Debt to the Catholic Church*, by the Right Rev. Henry G. Graham).

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It sounds like from what he has said, we have the Catholic Church to thank for the Bible, especially the New Testament. The Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, sifting through the many books then circulating chose only those it considered divinely inspired. In this regard, Bishop Graham states:

I make bold to say that a calm consideration of the part that Rome took in the making and drawing up and preserving of the Christian Scriptures will convince any impartial mind that to the Catholic Church alone, so much maligned, we owe it that we know what the New Testament should consist of and why precisely it consists of these books and of no others; and that without her we should, humanly speaking, have had no New Testament at all, or, if a New Testament, then one in which works spurious and works genuine would have been mixed up in ruinous and inextricable confusion.

By spurious the bishop means not authentic or not genuine. The Church has called these books apocryphal. There were many spurious books floating around during the first few centuries of the Church's existence, some of which we considered in our discussion above on the differences between Protestant and Catholic Bibles. Before Carthage many spurious or false books existed side by side with the genuine books. We know the names of many of them and it took the wisdom of the Catholic Church to separate the true from the false. After all, the Church wrote the Bible under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so it should have known which of the books are genuine and which false. According to Bishop Graham, before the Council of Carthage, there existed three classes of Christian writings, which are as follows:

1. **Books that were considered Canonical or genuine:** Canonical books were those written by Apostles or other prominent Christians, such as the four Gospels, the Epistles of St. Paul, and the Acts of the Apostles.
2. **Books whose authenticity was disputed:** Disputed books included ones that were accepted as genuine in some places and as false in others. These books include the Epistle of St James, Epistle of St Jude, Second Epistle of St Peter; 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistles of St John, Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Apocalypse of St John. All of the Canonical and these disputed books were to be approved by the Council of Carthage in 397. There were other disputed books that were not approved by the Council as inspired books, such as the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles, Apostolic Constitutions, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, St Paul's Epistle to the Laodiceans, Epistle of St Clement, and others. These books had been read at Holy Mass and used for preaching and catechesis in many congregations prior to the Council.
3. **Books declared spurious or false:** There were many books that existed in the early

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centuries of the Church that were not considered having Apostolic authority; that is, they were not written by one of the Apostles or the other Evangelists. Bishop Graham tells us that although some of these books may have contained authentic information about what our Lord said and did during his earthly life, they also contained what the Bishop calls “absurd fables, superstitions, childish stories and miracles of Jesus and his Apostles that made them a laughing-stock to the world.” The list of false books that still exist include around fifty Gospels (such as the *Gospel of James* and the *Gospel of Thomas*), about 22 Acts (such as the *Acts of Pilate* and the *Acts of Paul*), and a lesser number of Epistles and Apocalypses. These books were not recognized as canonical by the Church even before the Council of Carthage and, of course, were rejected outright as “Apocrypha” or false books at the Council.

How do we know that the books that were selected at the Council of Carthage in 397 are genuinely inspired books? The decrees on the Canon approved at the Council of Carthage in 397 were renewed at the Second Council of Carthage 419 AD and confirmed by Pope Boniface. St Augustine presided over the second council. According to Bishop Graham:

Under the guidance of the Holy Ghost the Council declared “This is genuine, that is false”; “this is apostolic, that is not apostolic.” She sifted, weighed, discussed, selected, rejected, and finally decided what was what. Here she rejected a writing that was once very popular and reckoned by many as inspired and was actually read as Scripture at public service; there, again, she accepted another that was very much disputed and viewed with suspicion and said: “This is to go into the New Testament.” She had the evidence before her; she had tradition to help her; and above all she had the assistance of the Holy Spirit to enable her to come to a right conclusion on so momentous a matter.

The decisions made at Carthage were reaffirmed by the Council of Florence in 1442, under Pope Eugenius IV, and the Council of Trent in 1546.

From a practical point of view, the Council looked at which books were used in the liturgies, creeds, and catechesis from the beginning by the early principal dioceses, such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Alexandria, and Rome, churches all established by the Apostles themselves. Moreover, the Council approved as inspired books that had been considered canonical by all of the early Church Fathers. By whatever means the final list of inspired books was selected, we have the Catholic Church to thank for the Bible, the very Word of God. The Church existed before the Bible was written, she wrote the Bible, she selected the books for the Canon of the Bible, she preserves the Bible, she transmitted them down to the present, and only she can properly interpret it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

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Some scholars have claimed that the apocryphal writings were written before the canonical Gospels. As we discussed this matter at some length during our series on *The Da Vinci Code*, we proved then that just the opposite is true, that the canonical Gospels were written before the apocryphal writings. It is amply documented by many sources. For example, during the mid-second century Justin Martyr in his *The First Apology* explained the Christian liturgy to non-Christians and describes the Gospels written by the Apostles. About the same time, Tertullian in his *Five Books Against Marcion* who was a quasi-Gnostic, defended the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, St. Paul's epistles, the epistle to the Hebrews, and 1 John, and The Apocalypse. And it was only a couple of decades later that Irenaeus of Lyons in his *Against Heresies* specifically discusses the four Gospels and their authors and inferred that they held a high place in the Church.

The Gnostic books weren't written until several decades, or even centuries, after the New Testament books. In this scenario we get a picture of the Gnostic writings as the result of an intense struggle of heretical sects against the established teachings of the apostolic Catholic Church. Competent historians claim that these struggles erupted in the second century, especially around 135 to 165 A.D., and continued for quite a long period. For example, St. Irenaeus wrote his great refutation of Gnosticism, *Against Heresies*, especially the Valentinians, around 180 A.D.

**The reliability of the Gospels:** When all is said and done, is it reasonable to believe that the Gospel accounts of the New Testament can be trusted. For anyone who takes the trouble to study the matter carefully, it is beyond a shadow of doubt that Sacred Scripture tells the truth and nothing but the truth. The Gospels are "not merely religious propaganda, hopelessly tainted by overactive imaginations and evangelistic zeal." Many outstanding Scripture scholars and historians have made a convincing case that the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses or writers who relied on eyewitness accounts. Moreover, they have proven that the Gospel accounts of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ into Heaven were written soon after the events themselves. These factors are unmistakable earmarks of accuracy, happening too soon after the events to allow for the formation of legends or myths.

Furthermore, scholars have proven that the "gospel writers intended to preserve reliable history, were able to do so, were honest and willing to include difficult-to-explain material, and didn't allow bias to unduly color their reporting." One biblical scholar maintains, "The harmony among the Gospels on the essential facts, together with the dissimilarity of some details, gives historical credibility to the accounts. Also, the early Church "could not have taken root and flourished right there in Jerusalem if it had been teaching facts about Jesus that his own contemporaries could have exposed as exaggerated or false."

The Gospel accounts have been reliably preserved for us down through the centuries. Compared with other existing ancient documents, we possess a large number of manuscripts and fragments

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of manuscripts of the New Testament that were written very close to the time of the original documents (at least 5,000). The existing manuscripts of most ancient classical stories were written many centuries after the original compositions. In addition, scholars claim that the New Testament that we possess today is over 99% free of textual discrepancies, putting no major Christian doctrines in doubt. In other words, a comparison of the current New Testament with the oldest available manuscripts shows few textual discrepancies, proving that very few copyist or editorial errors exist in modern editions. The criteria used by the early Church to determine which documents should be considered inspired by the Holy Spirit and free from doctrinal error have ensured that we possess the most accurate records about Jesus.

Since this is such an important topic for our faith, we provide a summary of factors that prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the Gospels are reliable historical documents:

- **The Gospels are eyewitness accounts:** Matthew and John were Apostles of Jesus. Luke tells us that he interviewed eyewitnesses, which, probably included the Blessed Mother herself. Mark was Peter's close associate.
- **They were written within living memory of the events they describe:** Reliable Scripture scholars believe that the Gospels were almost certainly written before 70 AD, because they do not mention the destruction of the Temple, which occurred that year. John's gospel was the last to be written, but in accordance with the Ryland's papyrus fragment, we know that it was almost certainly written before 90 A.D.
- **They have independent corroboration:** Flavius Josephus wrote in *Jewish Antiquities* about Jesus' life, miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection. Other independent sources include Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny the Younger.
- **No one contradicted them during their early distribution:** No documents of the time contain any contradictions of the facts presented in the Gospels. This includes Jesus' enemies who would have had every reason to point out any contradictions or false statements to others.
- **The authors had nothing to gain and everything to lose, including their lives:** The authors of the Gospels gained neither fame, wealth, nor power. All of them except John were martyred.
- **Existing texts have not been altered:** The very earliest extant texts of the Gospels agree with later texts. We have texts of the Gospels older than the texts of any non-biblical texts, which substantially agree with present day texts.

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- **They are absolutely free from legendary and mythological development:** The Apostles are described as having human faults and failings. They describe miracles and supernatural events in a matter-of-fact way.

### *The Old Testament Canon*

The Catholic Church accepts the books of the Old Testament on the authority of the Jews. The Church received the Old Testament Books through Christ and his Apostles in the Greek Translation called the *Septuagint*. The name was derived from the Latin *septuaginta*, which means seventy. As was discussed above, with the spread of the Jews into many lands at various times and circumstances, the need arose for the translation of the Bible into new tongues. The *Septuagint* was the most notable of these translations. The *Septuagint* was the first Greek version of the Old Testament made at Alexandria, Egypt between 250 and 100 B.C., traditionally by 70 Jewish translators and was designed to be used by the large number of Jews in Egypt who had adopted the Greek language. The New Testament quotations from the Old Testament are mostly taken from it and not from the Hebrew. It is often referred to simply as LXX. So, the version of the Old Testament used by the early Christians was the *Septuagint*. The *Catechism* says of the Old Testament, “Christians venerate the Old Testament as true Word of God. The Church has always vigorously opposed the idea of rejecting the Old Testament under the pretext that the New has rendered it void (Marcionism)” (No. 123). As we discussed in our series on the Da Vinci Code, Marcion was the leader of this idea.

How can we know for certain that the Hebrew Scriptures are inspired? That their credibility and integrity can be trusted? The infallible teaching authority of the Catholic Church guarantees the truthfulness and integrity of the Scriptures, including the Old Testament. This means that we can have confidence that the books of the Bible are substantially the same as they were when they left the hands of the writers. Furthermore, the credibility and integrity of the Scriptures can also be proved on the testimony of the Sacred Writings themselves as well as on the testimony of Jewish and Christian tradition. St Augustine once said that he could not believe in the Bible without the testimony and witness of the Catholic Church.

**The testimony of the Jewish tradition:** For example, Fr. John Laux tells us in his *Introduction to the Bible* that from the Bible we learn in the book of Deuteronomy that Moses wrote the words of the law and delivered it to the Levites to be put in the side of the Ark of the Covenant.” (Deuteronomy 31: 9-13; 24-26). Also, the Book of Joshua tells us that Joshua made additions to the “volume of the law of the Lord” (Joshua. 24,26). Moreover in 1 Kings we find that Samuel “wrote the law of the kingdom in a book, and laid it up before the Lord” (1 Kings 10:25). What’s more, we find from several sources that the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, wrote down

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prophecies and accounts of historical events and entrusted them to their disciples. We know from the Old Testament that the Psalms were used in public worship as early as 700 B.C. (2 Chronicles 29:30) and that around 450 B.C. Esdras collected the Mosaic Law and read it to the people (2 Esdras 8). We learn from 2 Maccabees that Nehemiah collected the books of the Kings, of David, and of the Prophets into a library (2 Maccabees. 2:13). This and other evidence proves that the Jewish authorities collected the Sacred Books and, therefore, considered them genuine.

Further evidence that the books of the Old Testament are genuine is the fact that they don't glorify the Jewish people. In fact, the contrary is true. Although the Old Testament describes the glorious mission of the Chosen People and God's extraordinary providence in their behalf, it also describes their unfaithfulness to God on numerous occasions. One could conclude from this that the Jews have no reason to keep the sacred Scriptures except for their belief in their authenticity and truthfulness. In other words, the Scriptures, even when they are unflattering to Jewish conduct, is part of their tradition.

**The testimony of the New Testament:** What about proving the credibility and integrity of the Old Testament Scriptures from the testimony of Christian tradition? We believe that the most powerful argument for the authenticity and truthfulness of the Old Testament is from the testimony of Christ and his Apostles. Jesus makes reference to the Old Testament on many occasions (For example see John 5:39; 5:45-46; 19:36; Luke 24:44) as did St. Paul (2 Timothy 3:16) and St. Peter (2 Peter 1:21). To illustrate a couple of these references: Jesus says in John 5:39, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me;" Jesus says in Luke 24:44, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled."

If one accepts the New Testament he must also accept the Old Testament on which it is based. To repeat St. Augustine once again, the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament.

**The testimony of non-Biblical sources:** In addition to those factors, secular history and archaeology has proven that the accounts in the Old Testament are true. Fr. Laux says that the history found in the Old Testament is closely interwoven with the history of most of the great nations and empires of ancient world. No established facts of secular history have been found to contradict the facts found in the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah (20:1) mentions an Assyrian king by the name of Sargon. For a long time secular historians had not come across this king in their researches, so many historians considered the story in the Bible that contained the name to be a fable. However, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, archaeological excavations at Nineveh uncovered numerous inscriptions referring to him as well as his portrait.

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Another example is found in 1Kings 14:25 that mentions an Egyptian King by the name of Sheshonk, who invaded Palestine and plundered Jerusalem under King Solomon's successor Rohoboam. He too was unknown to secular historians until his name was found in an inscription in Karnak, Egypt in the early twentieth century. Even another example is found in 2 Kings 18:14 that tells about the story of the Assyrian king Sennacherib's expedition to Jerusalem. Archaeologists have found Babylonian inscriptions proving the truth of this account.

Although there are many more such examples, one more should suffice to make our point, that the biblical account is confirmed by secular history and archaeology. Ancient historians had long said that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon, but the biblical account in Daniel 5 states that Baltassar (Belshazzar) was the last Babylonian king. Consequently, secular historians had maintained that the story of Daniel's interpretation of the writing on the wall told in this chapter was nothing but a myth. Then two documents written on clay cylinders were found in the ruins of Babylon in which Nabonidus speaks of his first-born son Baltassar and in another document reference is made to the reign of Baltassar, thus proving that Daniel's story was no myth.

## TRANSLATING THE BIBLE

The Old Testament originally was written in Hebrew with a few Aramaic portions, whereas the entire New Testament was originally written in Greek with a few Aramaic sources. What we read today, of course, is not the original languages in which the Bible was written, but someone's translation of the Bible. One might reasonably ask, why are there so many English translations of the Bible? The noted Scripture scholar, Professor Felix Just, S.J. of Loyola Marymount University asks the same question, "Why are there so many different English translations of the Bible? And why can't churches or scholars agree on just one translation?" The reasons he gives are as follows:

- **No original manuscript of any biblical book survives:** All of the texts written by the biblical authors themselves have been lost or destroyed over the centuries. All we have are copies of copies of copies, most of them copied hundreds of years after the original texts were written.
- **The extant manuscripts contain certain numerous textual variations:** There are literally thousands of differences in the surviving biblical manuscripts, many of them minor (spelling variations, synonyms, different word orders), but some of them major (whole sections missing or added).
- **Important old manuscripts were found in the last 200 years:** Recent discoveries of older manuscripts (especially the Dead Sea Scrolls and the *Codex Sinaiticus*) have

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helped scholars get closer to the original text of the Bible, so that modern translations can be more accurate than medieval ones.

- **The meanings of some biblical texts are unknown or uncertain:** Some Hebrew or Greek words occur only once in the Bible, but nowhere else in ancient literature, so their exact meanings are unknown; and some biblical phrases are ambiguous, with more than one possible meaning.
- **Ancient languages are very different from modern languages:** Not only do Ancient Hebrew and Greek languages use completely different alphabets and vocabularies, but their grammatical rules and structures (word order, prepositions, conjugations of verbs, etc.) are very different from modern English.
- **Every translation is already an interpretation:** Anyone who knows more than one modern language realizes that translations often have meanings that are slightly different from the original, and that different people inevitably translate the same texts in slightly different ways.
- **All living languages continually change and develop over time:** Not only is “Modern English” very different from sixteenth century English, but the language used in Great Britain, America, Australia, and other countries are slightly different from each other (in spelling, grammar, idioms, word meanings, pronunciation, etc.).
- **Cultural developments require new sensitivities in language:** Recent awareness of the evils of racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of discrimination have shown how certain language is slanted or biased, with corresponding efforts to develop more “inclusive” language alternatives.

Fr. Just says as a consequence:

*[N]o translation is ‘perfect’ (none of them can be completely ‘literal’ or 100% identical to the original texts) and there is no ‘best’ translation (all of them have some advantages and some drawbacks). In general, however, the most recent translations (1980’s or 1990’s) are better than the older ones (esp. the KJV or the Douay-Rheims, both about 400 years old and uses thee, thou, and thy for possessive pronouns and adds the est to the end of certain verbs), not only since the English language has changed significantly over the centuries, but more importantly because of the ancient biblical manuscripts that have been discovered in the last 50 to 150 years which are much older (and thus closer to the originals) than the manuscripts that were available to the translators of previous centuries.” (English Translation of the Bible by Prof. Felix Just, S.J., Loyola Marymount University).*

### *Translation Philosophies*

Another issue that comes up in biblical translation is translation philosophies. According to Professor Just, biblical scholars recognize two basic philosophies or styles of translation: “formal correspondence”; and “dynamic equivalence”. Other popular versions of the Bible in English are not truly translations, but are merely “paraphrases” of other translations instead.

**Formal Correspondence Translations:** Formal Correspondence is also called Formal Equivalence or Complete Equivalence translations. Formal Correspondence translations try to provide as literal a translation of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek wording of texts as possible. Translators using this philosophy try to stay as close to the original documents as possible by trying to maintain a lot of the original word order. One Scripture scholar says that those employing Formal Correspondence methodology try to produce something whose form is as close to the original form as possible, which means that the same Greek word should be translated consistently as the same English word where possible, so people can see the form of the Greek by looking at the English. This is similar to literal translations; however, they really aren't literal, because they do try to deal with idioms. Lots of Greek words can have many different effects, particularly prepositions and conjunctions, so normally Formal Equivalence translations will choose different English words to express this. Nonetheless, the intent is to bring over the form as well as the content of the original. This method is sometimes called the literal method and to many it seems to be the most accurate method; however, employment of this method requires detailed explanations in footnotes to avoid being misinterpreted by modern readers.

**Dynamic Equivalence Translations:** Scripture scholars tell us that the goal of Dynamic Equivalence translations is to transfer the same message to the twentieth century reader that the original did to the original reader. The English sentence structure isn't always similar to the original, since people say things differently in English than in Greek or Hebrew. Translators attempt to bring out the implications of figures of speech and other implications that were part of the intended meaning, but require special efforts to get across in English. These are obviously loose translations. Translators who use this method try to put the sense of the original text into the best possible modern languages, in our case English, while trying to remain close to the ideas expressed in the original Greek or Hebrew version as possible.

The Dynamic Equivalency translator does not always follow the exact wording or word order in the original, but tries to express the original text in ways that people speak today. In this regard, Fr. Just states that “they may seem less ‘literal’ than the formal correspondence translations, but can be just as ‘faithful’ to the original text, and are therefore generally better suited for public proclamation or liturgical use” (*English Translation of the Bible*). *Catholic Answers* says in this regard, “According to this view, it does not matter whether the grammar and word order of the

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original is preserved in English so long as the meaning of the text is preserved. This frees up the translator to use better English style and word choice, producing more readable translations.” However, as *Catholic Answers* tells us there are disadvantages of the looser translations, one being that “there is a price to pay for readability. Dynamic translations lose precision because they omit subtle cues to the meaning of a passage that only literal translations preserve. They also run a greater risk of reading the translators’ doctrinal views into the text because of the greater liberty in how to render it.”

**Comparison of Formal Correspondence with Dynamic Equivalence translations:** *Catholic Answers* provides us with a good comparison of the two methods of translation, which follow:

Compare the following renderings of Leviticus 18:6-10 from the *New American Standard Bible* (NAS—a literal translation) and the *New International Version* (NIV—a dynamic translation): The NAS reads:

None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness. . . . You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness. The nakedness of your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether born at home or born outside, their nakedness you shall not uncover. The nakedness of your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover; for their nakedness is yours.”

On the other hand, "The NIV reads:

No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. . . . Do not have sexual relations with your father’s wife; that would dishonor your father. Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere. Do not have sexual relations with your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter; that would dishonor you.

One can readily see that the second example, the Dynamic Equivalence translation, is much easier to read than the first one, the Formal Correspondence translation. In fact, in the former one is likely to not get the point of the passage.

To sum up the advantages and disadvantages of strict versus loose translations, many Scripture scholars consider literal translations or Formal Correspondence translations good for in-depth academic study of the Bible, but they don’t believe they are as suitable for the ordinary reader of the Bible, because they can be difficult to understand when heard or read aloud. As *Catholic Answers* states in this regard, “Sometimes the meaning of a verse depends on subtle cues in the

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text; these cues are only preserved by literal translations.” However, a disadvantage of literal translations is that “they are harder to read because more Hebrew and Greek style intrudes into the English text.” Also, literal translations can be difficult to interpret in places, because the original Greek and Hebrew might not have modern equivalents. For example, Greek or Hebrew idioms might not have the same meaning as does our languages today. Regarding this matter, *Catholic Answers* tell us, “Because literal translations can be difficult to read, many have produced more readable Bibles using the dynamic equivalence philosophy. According to this view, it does not matter whether the grammar and word order of the original is preserved in English so long as the meaning of the text is preserved. This frees up the translator to use better English style and word choice, producing more readable translations.” The disadvantage of dynamic translation is that they lose precision because they omit subtle cues to the meaning of a passage that only literal translations can convey. Also, dynamic translations make it easier for the translator to read his own doctrinal views into the translation. For example, I’ve read that dynamic Protestant translations, such as the NIV, tend to translate the Greek word *ergon* and its derivatives as “work” when it reinforces Protestant doctrine, but translate it as “deeds” or “doing” when it would support Catholic doctrine.

**Biblical Paraphrases:** These types of translations are not very accurate translations and don't claim to be. Examples of such “Bibles” are popular books intended for children or teenagers, and the “Living Bible”. These books contain condensed versions of the Bible and omit much of the original material. Moreover, the wording of the original texts is freely changed to make the stories easier to understand and more “relevant” for their intended readers."

### *The Best Bible Translations*

Now that we have finished discussing the meaning of the various biblical translation philosophies and their advantages and disadvantages, let's identify various translations. First, we'll provide some examples of literal or Formal Correspondence translations.

**Formal Correspondence translations:** We understand that there are over 500 different English translations of the Bible, so we will consider only the more popular ones. Toward the literal end of the spectrum are translations such as the Protestant *Authorized Version* (AV), better known as the *King James Version* (KJV) of 1611, and the *New King James Version* (NKJV) 1979-82; the *New American Standard Bible* (NAS); and the Catholic *Douay-Rheims Version*, NT; OT 1609-10, and revised in 1749 (Bishop Challanor edition) and 1941.

The *Douay-Rheims Version* was the official Catholic English translation for several centuries before Vatican II. Just as many Protestants believe that God revealed himself to us in Elizabethan

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English, I think some Catholics think that the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Jesus spoke to us in similar seventeenth century English. We don't have time to go into the history of these translations, but they are very different in many respects.

The *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) is considered a slightly less than literal translations, but still a Formal Correspondence translation, as well as is the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV). This translation doesn't use “thee, thy, and thou”, or other obsolete words. Although giving the history of this version would take too much of our time, there are both Protestant and Catholic versions of these Bibles. The versions approved for Catholics are called Catholic Editions. The RSV is my favorite translation, which is favored by many Catholics who are more conservative or traditional. There is also a *New Revised Standard Version* approved for Catholics, but this is not favored by more conservative or traditional Catholics, because although following the literal interpretation of the RSV, it uses “gender inclusive language”, which tries to translate the original text into a modern “gender neutral” cultural equivalents. When one reads the NRSV, he or she will often encounter “friends”, “beloved”, and “brothers and sisters”, qualified by a footnote stating “Greek meaning = brothers”. Also, to avoid masculine terms it uses “they” instead of “he”, turning entire passages into plural meanings. The worst fault of this and other gender inclusive translations is to avoid using masculine gender words they often use “God” and “Christ” when the original text says “he”. Theologically this might not matter, unless the use of the neutral gender questions the masculinity of the three divine Persons of the Trinity.

**Dynamic Equivalence Translations:** Although some scholars would classify them as Formal Correspondence translations, the *New International Version* (NIV) (1973 NT; 1978 OT, mainly an evangelical Protestant Bible) and the Catholic *New American Bible* (NAB) of 1970, with only the NT and Psalms revised as of 1987, are examples of looser translations of the Bible. None of them use “thee and thou”, or other obsolete words. Both are translated from the original languages, but both are written in readable contemporary English. The NAB is sort of the official Bible of the Catholic Church in the U.S., for it is used in the lectionary of the Mass in this country. However, with each revision, the NAB has gotten more “gender inclusive”, which renders it less acceptable to more conservative and traditional Catholics. The *New International Version* is a completely new translation of the Holy Bible made by more than a 100 scholars representing more than 20 denominations working directly from more than 5,000 complete or partial Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts and papyri. It must be a pretty good translation, because *Catholic Answers* uses it as well as the Catholic Edition of the *Revised Standard Version* in answering their apologetical questions. However, Catholics have to be careful about using translations that are primarily Protestant, because they might not contain all of the books considered by the Church to be canonical and because the footnotes might be misleading, even contrary to Catholic doctrine. I didn't look at the notes for this Bible, but it looks like it contains all of the canonical books from glancing at the Table of Contents.

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**Paraphrases:** Toward the very dynamic end of the spectrum are the *Jerusalem Bible* (JB) of 1966 and the *New Jerusalem Bible* (NJB) of 1985); the *New English Bible* (NEB); the *Revised English Bible* (REB); the *Contemporary English Version* (CEV); and the *Good News Bible*, whose translation is called *Today's English Version* (TEV).

The *Jerusalem Bible* is a Catholic translation. It is based on a French translation and the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition is known as the *New Jerusalem Bible* (NJB). I understand that, in the main, it tends to be a dynamic equivalence translation. The French translation was made from Hebrew and Greek texts, and even though it is considered a paraphrase, for the most part Scholars think highly of the translation, especially of the Old Testament. *Today's English Version* (TEV), also known as the *Good News Bible*, and the *New English Bible* (NEB) and the *Revised English Bible* (REB), both translated by Protestant churches in Great Britain are considered paraphrases. These might be good enough translations, but Catholics should stay away from them, for like all Protestant translations, doctrinal errors creep in such translations and the footnotes inevitably reflect a Protestant bias.

Finally, there are several paraphrases, which are not translations based on the original languages, but are paraphrased versions of English translations. The best known of these paraphrases is the *Living Bible* (TLB), also known as "The Book".

**The best translations for Catholics:** When all is said and done, which type of Bible translations are the best for Catholics? In other words, how does a Catholic pick the best Bible translation? To begin with, as I just said, Catholics should read only Catholic editions of the Bible, mainly because Protestant Bibles tend to be translated with certain words that emphasize Protestant interpretations of doctrinal matters. Moreover, the footnotes also reinforce Protestant doctrinal interpretations. Aside from that, one's choice of a Bible depends on how he or she intends to use the Bible. *Catholic Answers* and Fr. Just and other biblical scholars advise us that if we intend to do serious scholarly Bible study, literal translations or Formal Equivalence translations are what we need. Translators using this philosophy try to stick close to the originals, even preserving much of the original word order. Sometimes the meaning of a verse depends on subtle cues in the text; these cues are only preserved by literal translations. They enable the reader to catch more of the detailed implications of the text, but at the price of readability. By using such texts, the reader won't have to worry so much about the translators' views coloring the text, though even very literal translations are not completely free from this entirely. Examples of literal translation Catholic Bibles include the *Revised Standard Version*, *Catholic Edition* and the *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

On the other hand, those of us who read the Bible primarily for spiritual nourishment might be better served by selecting a dynamic equivalence translation, which provides a more contem-

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porary rendering of the text. Catholic dynamic equivalence translations of the Bible include the *New American Bible* and the *Jerusalem Bible*.

Fr. Just brings up another issue in regard to selecting a Bible. He says that "*no translation is 'perfect'* (none of them can be completely 'literal' or 100% identical to the original texts) and *there is no 'best' translation* (all of them have some advantages and some drawbacks). In general, however, the most recent translations (1980's or 1990's) are better than the older ones (esp. the KJV or the *Douay-Rheims*, both about 400 years old), not only since the English language has changed significantly over the centuries, but more importantly because of the ancient biblical manuscripts that have been discovered in the last 50 to 150 years which are much older (and thus closer to the originals) than the manuscripts that were available to the translators of previous centuries" (*English Translations of the Bible*).

One biblical scholar has suggested that Catholics select several versions of the Bible, being aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each. He says that it is often possible to get a better sense of what is being said in a passage by comparing several different translations.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR READING THE BIBLE

Before we go on to look at Biblical Criticism and Genres, we'll provide some general principles how to read the Scriptures and how to pray over them. Fr. Felix Just S.J. has provided us with the following advice on how to read the Bible:

- Seek the original intention of the author;
- Determine the literary form of the work: For example, the Bible contains variety: laws, fables, myths, histories, genealogies, etiologies or causes, poems, songs, epics—each must be understood within its own category, NOT as historical "truth";
- Explore the social, cultural, and historical setting;
- Interpret text in light of the content/unity of the entire Bible: The Bible contains a variety of perspectives and "rereading's" of certain texts;
- Revelation = God's self-communication within text: God's revelation is both historical and incarnational: interwoven in human history, language, culture—God *chooses* to be revealed within human limitations;

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- Inspiration, that is, God is revealed THROUGH the medium of the strengths and weaknesses of the human author as a real author; God's revelation of *religious* truth within the framework of particular literary formats and artistic abilities; does NOT mean divine dictation;
- Inerrancy = Bible teaches without error those truths which are necessary for human salvation;
- Truth doesn't contradict itself—scientific truth can't oppose religious truth; religion, though sometimes going *beyond* reason, can't be Unreasonable;
- The church community gave birth to the Bible and not vice versa! (Both OT & NT);

## LECTIO DIVINA: PRAYING OVER THE SCRIPTURES

*Lectio Divina* was a method of prayer used by the early monks and desert fathers of the Church and refined by St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St Ignatius of Loyola, and other holy saints and spiritual directors. Fr. Kenneth Baker, Editor of *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review* describes the method of *Lectio Divina* in the simplest terms in his wonderful book *Inside the Bible*. The method is as follows:

- Select a passage of the Bible.
- Be aware of the presence of God.
- Read and meditate on the passage.
- Respond with acts of faith, hope, and love.

Sam Anthony Morello, OCD, a Carmelite priest, provides us with a more detailed explanation of *Lectio*, which is as follows:

- **Lectio** itself, which means reading, understood as the careful repetitious recitation of a short text of Scripture
- **Meditatio** or meditation, an effort to fathom the meaning of the text and make it personally relevant to oneself in Christ
- **Oratio**, which means prayer, taken as a personal response to the text, asking for the grace of the text or moving over it toward union with God
- **Contemplatio**, translated contemplation, gazing at length on something spiritual.

He says that the idea behind this final stage or element is “that sometimes, by the infused grace of

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God, one is raised above meditation to a state of seeing or experiencing the text as mystery and reality; one comes into experiential contact with the One behind and beyond the text. It is an exposure to the divine presence, to God's truth and benevolence."

To explain in more detail Morello says that the word of God gradually moves from the lips in *lectio* to the mind in *meditatio*, and into the heart in *oratio*. This sets the stage for *contemplation*, or contemplation. By this process one slowly begins to see what the Scriptures are saying and to transform one's life. Morello says of this process "Repetitious reading places the biblical word on the lips. Meditation puts the word in the mind. Prayer takes it to the heart. And then, by the mystical grace of God, contemplation engraves the word in the depths of the spirit. He tells us that this process should lead us to action for the love of God and neighbor.

Can this method of prayer be used for other types of spiritual reading? Yes it can! But Morello says that the Bible provides the best book for private prayer. He defines *Lectio Divina* as "dwelling on a scriptural text in the divine presence for the sake of radical change in Christ. Yet again, we could say that *lectio* is making one's own a small selection, phrase, or word of the Bible, in pursuit of greater faith, hope, and charity." The best way to feed prayer is to ponder the words of Scripture. He says that Carmelites and other Christians make a great mistake in trying to practice the presence of God without sustaining it by the word of God, that is the Bible. He says that we need to learn to pray over God's word. He quotes St. Teresa as saying "Any sentence or phrase or word of Scripture, repeated over and over or recited very carefully, is vocal prayer; and that word or vocal prayer is drawn from her favorite book, the Gospels. In short, Teresa's teachings on vocal prayer and on the use of the Gospels come together in the practice of praying over the Scriptures. This makes for a most substantial prayer life." (*Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer*)

Can *Lectio Divina* be practiced by groups? Morello says that *Lectio Divina* can be practiced on an individual or communal level. He tells us that there is evidence that groups practiced praying over the Scriptures as early as the third century, at the time of Origen. Origen relates that he used to give homilies based on a text of Scripture read continuously throughout a week. At that time there were daily gatherings devoted to the reading and explanation of Scripture. He also says that the practice did not always work out very well, so it was eventually abandoned.

*Lectio Divina*, especially individual, played an important part in monastic life during the Middle Ages and in modern times, an Instruction of the Biblical Commission, approved by Pope Pius XII, recommended this form of prayer to all clerics, secular and religious. Also, the Vatican II document *Dei Verbum* strongly urges that priests and religious employ the method of *Lectio Divina* and even recommends that laity acquire "through frequent reading of the divine Scripture the surpassing knowledge of Christ Jesus." The document not only recommends individual reading, but group reading as well. The document stresses that prayer should accompany the reading of

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Scripture “for prayer is the response to the Word of God encountered in Scripture under the inspiration of the Spirit. Many initiatives for communal reading have been launched among Christians and one can only encourage this desire to derive from Scripture a better knowledge of God and of his plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. Interpretation is the Church’s responsibility; only the Church is protected by the Holy Spirit.”

Spiritual directors have recommend other methods for enhancing prayer life. Morello tells us that St. Teresa advocated the use of sacred images as well as reading in her prayer life. Images were especially helpful to her because of her difficulty in picturing what she had never seen. From my own reading of St. Teresa, I know that she strongly urged us to especially read about or gaze on statues or pictures depicting the humanity of Jesus, especially of his passion.

## BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Both Old Testament and New Testament criticism originated in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenment and sought to use the scientific method to interpret the Bible. The method grew out of the practice of employing scientific methodology to the humanities, especially history. Scholars tended to study either the Old or New Testaments, because no single scholar had enough knowledge of the many languages required to study the Bible or of the cultural background for the different periods during which the texts were written.

### *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*

Modern Biblical Criticism began with seventeenth century philosophers and theologians such as Thomas Hobbes, Benedict Spinoza, Richard Simon and others who began to ask questions about the origin of the biblical text, especially the *Pentateuch* or first five books of the Old Testament—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These scholars were not content with the identity traditionally ascribed to the authors of the various books found in the Bible. For instance, according to tradition Moses was the author of the *Pentateuch*, but these critics thought they had found contradictions and inconsistencies in the text that questioned Mosaic authorship.

In the eighteenth century, Jean Astruc, who was a French physician, attempted to refute these critics by borrowing methods of textual criticism already in use to investigate Greek and Roman texts. From his studies, he thought he had discovered that Genesis was composed of two distinct documents. He believed these were the original scrolls written by Moses, much as the four Gospel writers had produced four separate but complementary accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus. He believed that later generations had combined these documents into the Book of Genesis,

producing the inconsistencies and contradictions noted by Hobbes and Spinoza. Textual Criticism is also called Lower Criticism.

**Advent of the Higher Criticism:** Later in the eighteenth century, German scholars such as Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827) and Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780–1849) employed Astruc's methods to biblical exegeses. The movement they initiated became known as the Higher Criticism to distinguish it from the longer established Lower Criticism. The school is said to have culminated with the influential synthesis of Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) in the 1870s. It seemed to many biblical scholars that the Bible had been fully explained as a human document.

The conclusions of the Higher Criticism were not welcomed by many religious scholars, especially those in the Catholic Church. Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903) condemned secular biblical scholarship in his 1893 encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*; however in 1943 Pope Pius XII gave Catholic scholars permission to employ the method of the Higher Criticism in his encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* where he stated:

As in our age, indeed new questions and new difficulties are multiplied, so, by God's favor, new means and aids to exegesis are also provided. Among these it is worthy of special mention that Catholic theologians, following the teaching of the Holy Fathers and especially of the Angelic and Common Doctor, have examined and explained the nature and effects of biblical inspiration more exactly and more fully than was wont to be done in previous ages. For having begun by expounding minutely the principle that the inspired writer, in composing the sacred book, is the living and reasonable instrument of the Holy Spirit, they rightly observe that, impelled by the divine motion, he so uses his faculties and powers, that from the book composed by him all may easily infer "the special character of each one and, as it were, his personal traits." Let the interpreter then, with all care and without neglecting any light derived from recent research, endeavor to determine the peculiar character and circumstances 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. (No. 33).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states in this regard:

In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current. For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression (No. 110).

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The Higher Criticism is also known as Historical Criticism and is used to examine the origins of a biblical text of both the Old and New Testaments. Higher Criticism is used to determine who wrote a text, when it was written, and where. One of the major problems investigated by New Testament biblical scholars using this method is the Synoptic Problem, which considers the question of how Matthew, Mark, and Luke are related to each other. Also, Higher Criticism has been used to authenticate the authorship of several of St. Paul's epistles and of certain Psalms. It is the method most used by modern biblical scholars, Catholic and Protestant

### New Testament

#### *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*

The quest for the historical Jesus has been defined as “the attempt to use historical rather than religious methods to construct a verifiable biography of Jesus.” Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) claimed in his *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906) that nineteenth century lives of Jesus revealed more of the author’s prejudices than about the life of Jesus. He maintains that the quest began in the eighteenth century with Hermann Samuel Reimarus and lasted until William Wrede in the nineteenth century. According to Schweitzer, the biblical scholars during the interim period used “the historical methodologies of their day to distinguish the mythology from the history of Jesus.”

In other words, they believed that the evidence showed that the real Jesus, the Jesus of History that lived in the early first century, was not the same as the Christ of Faith that had developed among his late first century followers. What we find in the Gospels is not what the real Jesus said and did, but how his later followers interpreted these sayings and actions. According to Schweitzer, “Reimarus pioneered ‘the search for the historical Jesus’, applying the Rationalism of the Enlightenment Era to claims about Jesus.” Reimarus applied the methodology of Greek and Latin textual studies to the study of the New Testament and “became convinced that very little of what it said there could be accepted as incontrovertibly true.”

Reimarus was a German philosopher who is remembered for his Deism, which according to one source is “the doctrine that human reason can arrive at a knowledge of God and ethics from a study of nature and our own internal reality, thus eliminating the need for religions based on revelation.” Deism is the religion that God designed and created the universe and all that is in it, and then stepped back and had no concern for its operation. Naturally, with such a view, Reimarus denied the possibility of miracles and prophecies. Some scholars credit him with being the initiator of the investigation of the historical Jesus. This view considers Jesus as just a simple religious teacher, rather than the divine person of traditional doctrine. Reimarus took his initial

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inspiration from the philosopher Christian Wolff (1679-1754), who was a German rationalist and considered to be the most eminent German philosopher between Leibniz and Kant. According to one source, Reimarus' goal was "to base theological truths on evidence of mathematical certitude." After Reimarus, the most dominant scripture scholars were Protestants, mainly German Lutherans.

Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789) was the first biblical scholar who described Jesus as a mere man in his *Ecce Homo—The History of Jesus of Nazareth, a Critical Inquiry* (1769). The work was first published in Amsterdam then translated into English in Edinburgh, 1799, London, 1813, and New York in 1827. David Frederick Strauss, (1808–1874, *Das Leben Jesu*), and Joseph Ernest Renan (1823–1892, *Vie de Jésus*) made the controversial assertions that "the life of Jesus should be written like the life of any historic person, and that the Bible could and should be subject to the same critical scrutiny as other historical documents." Johannes Weiss (1863–1914), Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), and others wrote the most important works on the historical Jesus in the nineteenth century.

A seminal biblical scholar of the nineteenth century was Heinrich Julius Holtzmann (1832–1910) who "established a chronology for the composition of the various books of the New Testament which formed the basis for future research on this subject, and established the two-source hypothesis (the hypothesis that the gospels of Matthew and Luke drew on the gospel of Mark and a hypothetical document known as Q)." Although Schweitzer was among the greatest contributors to this quest, he also ended the quest when he asserted that "each scholar's version of Jesus seemed little more than an idealized autobiography of the scholar himself."

During the first half of the twentieth century a new generation of scholars including Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), and others "had decided that the quest for the Jesus of history had reached a dead end. Barth and Bultmann accepted that little could be said with certainty about the historical Jesus, and concentrated instead on the kerygma, or message, of the New Testament."

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1948 revitalized interest in the possible contribution archaeology could make to the understanding of the New Testament. Joachim Jeremias (1900–1979) and C. H. Dodd (Charles Harold Dodd, (1884–1973) "produced linguistic studies which tentatively identified layers within the Gospels that could be ascribed to Jesus, to the authors, and to the early Church." Burton Mack and former priest John Dominic Crossan assessed Jesus in the cultural milieu of first-century Judea; and the scholars of the Jesus Seminar assessed the individual tropes of the Gospels to arrive at a consensus on what could and could not be accepted as historical ( see our essay and radio program on this website *Interpreting the Bible over the Ages* for details on the Jesus Seminar).

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Contemporary New Testament criticism continues to follow the synthesizing trend set during the latter half of the twentieth century. There continues to be a strong interest in recovering the “historical Jesus”, but this now tends to set the search in terms of Jesus' Jewishness (Bruce Chilton, Geza Vermes and others) and his formation by the political and religious currents of first-century Palestine (Marcus Borg).

The Quest for the Historical Jesus has been traditionally divided into four phases: The First or Original Phase, also known as the Old Quest from 1778-1906; the Interim Period or no-Quest phase from 1906-1953; the Second or New Quest from about 1953-1970; and the Third Quest from 1970 to the present. It is the results of the Quest or Search for the Historical Jesus, especially the Third Quest that we are bombarded with on numerous television programs, news magazine articles, and books by the hundreds. We consider each of these phases in detail in our essay *Interpreting the Bible through the Ages* located on this website.

Fr. John Hardon states in the *Modern Catholic Dictionary* that Biblical Criticism is “The scientific study and analysis of the human elements that have entered into the composition and preservation of the Scriptures.” He continues:

This study has been encouraged and fostered by the Church. The two outstanding papal documents urging Catholic scholars to engage in a scientific study of the Bible were Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* (1893), and Pope Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943). In all biblical criticism the Catholic Church insists on her scholars' recognizing that the Bible is the inspired word of God and consequently may not be treated as merely a human piece of writing. Moreover, the Church considers herself the divinely authorized custodian and interpreter of Sacred Scripture. Catholic scholars must therefore recognize that the Church's magisterium has the final word on the conclusions reached by biblical criticism. (Etym. Greek *kritikos*, able to discern or judge.)

### *Historical-Critical Method*

The most dominate form of Biblical Criticism employed by biblical scholars today is the Historical-Critical method. To begin, biblical “criticism” does not mean “criticizing” the text (i.e. what one doesn't like or doesn't agree with), but instead means “asking ‘critical’ questions based on ‘criteria’ that are as clear, careful, and objective as possible.” Regarding the Bible, Fr. Hardon states in the *Modern Catholic Dictionary* that the Historical-Critical method is “the study that seeks to determine the historical sources, authorships, and factual contents of the Scriptures. Its focus is on the historicity of the biblical persons and events.” One biblical scholar describes the Historical-Critical Method as “a procedure employed by biblical scholars to study Sacred Scripture by making use of historical research, literary analysis and the findings of anthropology,

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archaeology and other sciences. It is historical inasmuch as scholars seek to discover the social, economic, political and cultural setting of biblical times. It is critical in that experts judge and evaluate the text and its narrative in light of literary analysis and scientific information. Through this kind of scholarly detective work, modern Bible readers are interpreting what the ancient Bible writers had to say.” In other words, the goal of the Historical-Critical Method is to determine the authentic meaning of the Bible text as a literary document.

The Historical-Critical method uses several types of criticism or analysis; among the chief types are textual criticism, literary criticism, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and narrative criticism.

### *Textual Criticism*

Textual criticism is a branch of textual scholarship, philology, and literary criticism that is concerned with the identification and removal of copyists errors in texts, including manuscripts and printed books. Ancient scribes made errors, alterations or glosses when copying manuscripts by hand. Since original documents are not available, textual critics seek to reconstruct the original text (the archetype or autograph) as closely as possible. The ultimate objective is to produce a “critical edition” containing a text most closely approximating the original.

Textual Criticism is also called Lower Criticism, which is used in an attempt to determine what a text originally said before it was altered either by mistake, such as copyist error, or by someone’s intention. One source states:

[Textual Criticism] takes as its basis the fact that errors inevitably crept into texts as generations of scribes reproduced each other’s manuscripts. For example, Josephus employed scribes to copy his *Antiquities of the Jews*. As the scribes copied the *Antiquities*, they made mistakes. The copies of these copies also had the mistakes. The errors tend to form “families” of manuscripts: scribe *A* will introduce mistakes which are not in the manuscript of scribe *B*, and over time the “families” of texts descended from *A* and *B* will diverge further and further as more mistakes are introduced by later scribes, but will always be identifiable as descended from one or the other. Textual criticism studies the differences between these families to piece together a good idea of what the original looked like. The more surviving copies, the more accurately can they deduce information about the original text and about “family histories”.

The *Modern Catholic Dictionary* states that “Applied to the Bible, [textual criticism] is the study of the text of the Scriptures to determine, as far as possible, what had actually been written by the inspired authors. It deals with manuscripts, their preservation and comparison, and is the basis

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for all other research on the Bible.” It deals with the original words found in the text, and their meaning. The purpose is to attain greater accuracy in translations. It is the oldest and most basic of the methods of biblical analysis. It is used to identify the source of a text or to trace the history of a related group of texts. The job of the biblical scholar employing this method is to determine the proper meaning of a text, which, of course, can be very subjective at times.

### *Literary Criticism*

*Modern Catholic Dictionary* defines Literary Criticism relative to the Scriptures as “the study of the biblical text as a human, literary composition. It concentrates on the text, analyzing its style, grammatical forms, and structure, with a view to better understanding of what the author meant from the internal evidence of the words themselves.” *Oxford Biblical Studies* states:

In biblical studies, this included the investigation of sources and problems of authorship. The term is also used as in the study of poetry, drama, and novels, as an attempt to understand the biblical writings as literature. This involves, for example, appreciating the wealth of symbolism, metaphor, paradox, paronomasia, irony, and characterization and plot in the text. For example, 1 and 2 Samuel are read as lively stories rather than as fundamental historical sources for the monarchies of Saul and David. Similarly, the NT gospels can each be enjoyed as a whole.

Literary Criticism is sometimes known as Narrative Criticism. This type of criticism treats the text as a unit and analyzes the story of the text to discover its meaning, such as plot development, narrative structure and composition, setting, characters, themes, and literary techniques employed in the story. For example, whether or not the magi really existed is an historical question, whereas the narrative meaning might be that Christianity is open to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Of course, although we don't know precisely who they were or how many of them there were, the magi were probably real people who symbolized the entire human race. Some of the concerns of those using this method are as follows: the reliability of the narrator, the question of what the author intended in terms of the context in which the text was written and its presumed intended audience, and the awareness that a narrative is capable of more than one interpretation.

### *Source Criticism*

Source Criticism is a method used by biblical scholars to search for the original sources that lie behind a given biblical text. It has been traced back to the seventeenth century French priest Richard Simon. He wrote books on both the Old and New Testaments. One of his books described how the Old Testament has undergone changes and questioned the authorship of the Mosaic

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writings. Another gives an account of the main ancient and modern Old Testament translations, and the third dealt with biblical commentators. In 1689 he published a book on the New Testament in which he discusses the origin and character of the various books and considers the objections brought against them by the Jews and others. His works encountered strong opposition from Catholics who disliked his diminishing of the authority of the Church Fathers. Protestants disliked his arguments against the integrity of the Hebrew text as well as *sola scriptura*, favoring the Catholic Church's tradition of interpretation instead.

Julius Wellhausen (1844 – 1918), was the most seminal pioneer Old Testament biblical scholar employing source criticism. He is perhaps best known for his *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* of 1883 in which he introduced the Documentary Hypothesis in which he argued that the Torah or Pentateuch had its origins in a redaction (editing) of four originally independent texts dating from several centuries after the time of Moses, who had always been considered their traditional author. His hypothesis remained the dominant model for studies of the *Pentateuch* until the late twentieth century, when it began to be challenged by biblical scholars who thought they saw many more hands at work in the formation of the Pentateuch than the four sources identified by Wellhausen. (See a discussion of the Documentary Hypothesis below in this essay).

**The Synoptic Problem:** An example of source criticism in New Testament scholarship is the study of the Synoptic Problem. It had always been considered that the Gospels were written in the order they are placed in the New Testament. However, critics long noticed that the three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, were very similar, in fact, in places identical. The dominant theory to account for the duplication is called the two-source hypothesis, which suggests that Mark was the first gospel to be written, and that it was probably based on a combination of early oral and written material. Supposedly Matthew and Luke were written at a later time, and relied primarily on two different sources: Mark and a written collection of Jesus's sayings, which was given the name Q (*Quell* meaning source in German) by scholars. This latter document has not survived, but scholars who believe the hypothesis is the best explanation for the differences and similarities of the Synoptic Gospels maintain that at least some of its material can be deduced indirectly from the material that is common in Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark. In addition to Mark and Q, they maintain the writers of Matthew and Luke made some use of additional sources, which would account for the material that is unique to each of them. According to one source:

The Two-Source Hypothesis was first articulated in 1838 by Christian Hermann Weisse, but it did not gain wide acceptance among German critics until Heinrich Julius Holtzmann endorsed it in 1863. Prior to Holtzmann, most Catholic scholars held to the Augustinian hypothesis (Matthew → Mark → Luke) and Protestant biblical critics favored the Griesbach hypothesis (Matthew → Luke → Mark). The Two-Source Hypothesis crossed

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the channel into England in the 1880s primarily due to the efforts of William Sanday, culminating in B. H. Streeter's definitive statement of the case in 1924. Streeter further argued that additional sources, referred to as M and L, lie behind the material in Matthew and Luke respectively.

### Interpretation of the Pentateuch

One of the best ways to illustrate modern biblical criticism is to look at how it has been used to interpret the *Pentateuch*, the first five books of the Old Testament. The *Pentateuch* (Greek for five books or rolls), consists of the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Jews call it the *Torah* or Law. However, it contains more than the law of God, for it also contains the story of the creation and fall as well as the formation of his chosen people, the Israelites. The *Pentateuch* includes the story of God's covenants with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of Moses and the oppressed Israelites in Egypt. Also included is the story of the birth of the Israelites in the Sinai covenant and their journey to the edge of the Promised Land, and includes the sayings of Moses.

For a long time it was believed that Moses was the principal author of the *Pentateuch*. This seemed logical since in Exodus 34:27-28 we find that God commanded him to write the words of the Covenant on tablets of stone, and the book of Nehemiah says that when the Israelites returned from the Babylonian exile, the book of the "law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel" was read out in public (Nehemiah 8: 1-8). By the time of Jesus, these passages were interpreted to mean that Moses himself had written the *Pentateuch*. Several places in the New Testament make reference to this fact (Matthew 8:4; Mark 7:10; Luke 24:24; John 1:45; 5:46; Acts 3:22; Romans 10:5, 19; 1 Corinthians 9:9; 2 Corinthians 3:15). From then on both Jewish and Christian traditions assumed Moses was the main author of the *Pentateuch*.

But most modern biblical scholars for the last century or so believe that the composition of the first five books of the Bible is far more complex than this single authorship. What their research purports to show is that the final editing in the fifth century B.C. used materials from many different periods, some of them very ancient. The rearranged and rewritten text consisting of the first five books of the Bible was the version of the Bible that reached the Jews and Christians at the time of Jesus. It is this version that is known as the *Pentateuch*.

**The Documentary Hypothesis:** Many scholars believe that the *Pentateuch* consists of four traditions blended together over a long period of time. Some scholars have identified the so-called Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly, and Deuteronomic strands that make up the first five books of the Bible. They are logically abbreviated as J, E, P and D. This approach is called the Graf-Wellhausen or

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Documentary Hypothesis, named after K.H. Graf and Julius Wellhausen, both nineteenth century German Lutheran biblical scholars. Most biblical scholars seem to follow some version of this hypothesis today. This hypothesis still provides the basis upon which more recent hypotheses are founded. Each tradition has its own theological viewpoint.

### *The Yahwist Tradition*

The Yahwist writers of part of the *Pentateuch* use the name Yahweh in the Greek to refer to God. It is translated to “Lord” and is the name by which God revealed himself to the Israelites. God identified himself to Moses at the burning bush as “I AM WHO I AM”, or Yahweh. The Yahwist tradition is concrete and employs many anthropomorphisms in its theological approach, as is evident in the story of the creation found in Genesis 2. By anthropomorphisms is meant “an interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics”; in other words, a humanization of God and his deeds. For example, portraying the Father as an old man with a beard is an anthropomorphism. Old Testament biblical scholars tell us that the Yahwist source dates from about 950 B.C. in the southern kingdom of Judah and consists of half of Genesis and the first half of Exodus, plus fragments of Numbers.

### *The Elohist Tradition*

The Elohist writer of the *Pentateuch* uses the name Elohim for God. It means one of great majesty, grandeur, and power. The word probably derives from El, which was the oldest and most widespread name given to the divinity among all the Semitic peoples, including the Israelites. The Elohist parts of the *Pentateuch* are more sober and moralistic than the Yahwist. Scholars believe that the Elohist source was composed around 850 B.C. and focuses on the northern kingdom of Israel. The *Navarre Biblical Commentary* says that “It may well be that when the Northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in the ninth century, many Israelites fled south and brought with them their own interpreted traditions containing that theological content.” The Elohist narratives parallel the Yahwist and make up about a third of Genesis, the first half of Exodus, and a small part of Numbers.

### *The Priestly Tradition*

The *Navarre Biblical Commentary* on the *Pentateuch* states that the Babylonian Exile of the Israelites in the sixth century B.C., led to a period of deep religious soul searching. The priests among the exiles had to try to keep the people's faith alive and to protect them from the influences

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of Babylonian religion which was full of pagan myths and ritual practices. To do this they kept reminding the people of the traditions of their ancestors, pointing out that the entire history of mankind and particularly that of the people of Israel involved a series of covenants made by God with men. The literary activity of these priestly groups in Babylon (which was kept up after the return from exile) is to be seen in elaborate collections of laws about worship, priestly purity, and the purity of the people. In modern scholarship all this literary activity is described as belonging to the Priestly tradition. The Priestly source contains detailed genealogies and is much more theologically oriented than the others. It deals primarily with the Jewish priesthood and matters of worship as well as detailed lists of the Mosaic Law. It is believed to have been written around 550-400 BC and it makes up about a fifth of Genesis, substantial portions of Exodus and Numbers, and almost all of Leviticus.

### *The Deuteronomistic Tradition*

The *Navarre Biblical Commentary* tells us that the seventh century B.C., under Kings Hezekiah and Josiah, saw profound religious changes which helped towards a new understanding of the past and brought about a literary revival; this in turn, during and after the Exile, led to the writing of a history of Israel from the conquest of the promised land onwards found in the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. This account is usually described as the “Deuteronomistic” account (D), because it included Deuteronomy, or part of it, as an introduction to the history narrated in those books. The Deuteronomistic approach includes warnings, advice, and commands. In fact, a major part of the Deuteronomistic theme is the idea that as long as the Israelites obeyed God's commandments they would prosper, but if they broke them they would be punished. Scholars believe that it was originally composed around 650-621 B.C. and includes the book of Deuteronomy, which contains very little narrative and for the most part contains Moses' farewell speeches to the Israelites.

The editing, or redaction as it is called among biblical scholars, into the final version of the *Pentateuch* that we have today was completed about 400 B.C., perhaps by the prophet Ezra. This version is called R after redaction. Scholars believe that the editing began with combining the Yahwist and Elohist sources around 750 B.C., then later adding the Deuteronomistic source. And finally the priestly editors put it all together into its final form.

Wellhausen believed that that the four sources he identified in the *Pentateuch* give us a fairly accurate picture of Israel's religious history, one that was increasingly dominated by the priestly classes. His hypothesis was the dominant view on the origin of the *Pentateuch* for almost all of the twentieth century and most contemporary Bible scholars still accept some form of the documentary hypothesis.

**Criticism of the Documentary Hypothesis:** The Wellhausen or Documentary Hypothesis has not gone unchallenged, especially the dating of Deuteronomy and the pattern of development of the sources. Those who follow some version of the Hypothesis do not deny that Moses played some role in the composition of the Pentateuch, especially as lawgiver, but they don't believe he wrote the entire document. Conservative Scripture scholars on the other hand have vigorously defended the Mosaic authorship.

**The Catholic response:** Although Moses might not have written the entire *Pentateuch* exactly as it exists today, the Catholic Church has always insisted that he was the principal author and inspiration of the five books. Whether it be Moses or some other writers, they would have had to incorporate older material from many sources. The sacred story of the Israelites existed for centuries in verbal form and was transmitted by word-of-mouth from generation to generation. Catholic biblical scholars generally agree that, perhaps, the *Pentateuch* was not written down in its present form until the sixth century B.C. However, Catholics must be cautious when considering the validity of the biblical scholarship of non-Catholics such as Wellhausen and his followers.

Why do Catholics have to be careful about following the ideas of non-Catholic biblical scholars, especially regarding the Documentary Hypothesis? *Catholic Answers* points out that “the strength of Wellhausen’s theory is that it explains why there are differences of terms and ideas between different sections of the Pentateuch.” However, it points out that he used the hypothesis:

to reconstruct the history of the Old Testament in order to demonstrate that the religion of the Israelites began as a free-spirited affair, devoid of a priesthood and unconcerned about the law. Gradually, he believed, the priests were able to consolidate their power and force the people into a desiccated religion of legalistic and ritualistic observance known as Judaism. In his schema, then, Jesus Christ comes to liberate us and give us back a free-spirited religion without priests and laws. . . . It does not take much observation to see that this is a thinly veiled critique of Catholicism. Wellhausen, like many Protestants, believed that the early Church was without priests or laws and that the institutional Church lost this new sense of freedom in faith.

*Catholic Answers* tells us that within Wellhausen’s lifetime, “many points of his argument were disproved, often by new archaeological discoveries that contradicted his historical account.” As I said earlier, the Documentary Hypothesis is still very powerful today. *Catholic Answers* concludes its discussion by stating, “Wellhausen’s theory illustrates the undue influence of *historicism*, as he tends to date the four sources of the Pentateuch by where they fit into his historical scheme rather than on scientific criteria.” Fr. Hardon states in *Modern Catholic Dictionary*:

[Historicism is the theory] that claims that the secular history of anything is an adequate

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explanation of its meaning; that the values of a movement or philosophy are adequately understood by tracing it to its origins; and that something is fully understood if its development has been historically accounted for. Prime examples of modern historicism are the philosophies of history of Georg Hegel and Karl Marx.

### *Form Criticism*

Form Criticism is used to ascertain the literary form or genre of the text; in other words, "What type of literature is it?" Is it poetry, myth, history, etc. Of this method, Fr. Hardon states in the *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "As a broad discipline, it studies the literary structure of historical documents that preserve an earlier tradition. Its basic assumption is that the earlier, oral use of the tradition shaped the material and resulted in a variety of literary forms found in the final written record. A critical study of these forms sheds light on the life and thinking of the people who preserved the tradition." As such there is nothing wrong with the employment of this method; in fact, it can be a valuable tool with which to better understand historical documents. One source tells us:

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 and, especially, used. Tradition history is a specific aspect of form criticism which aims at tracing the way in which the pericopes entered the larger units of the biblical canon, and especially the way in which they made the transition from oral to written form. The belief in the priority, stability, and even detectability, of oral traditions is now recognised to be so deeply questionable as to render tradition history largely useless, but form criticism itself continues to develop as a viable methodology in biblical studies.

However, as Fr. Hardon says, many biblical scholars have applied the method to a study of the Bible with presuppositions, that is prejudices. He informs us that this method of biblical criticism, "Applied to the Bible . . . mistakenly assumes that the native forces behind Christian tradition in the early Church was not the desire to preserve the memory of what Jesus had preached and done, but was a need to serve a religious fervor of a new community. Such necessarily would tend to obscure and embellish, if not distort the facts to meet the needs of an idealistic faith" (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*).

**Biblical Genres and Form Criticism:** Professor Felix Just, S.J. of Loyola Marymount University, a noted biblical scholar, defines "genre" as "the literary 'form' or 'category' of a text. He identifies larger genres in the New Testament to include "Gospels, Letters, Acts, Apocalypses,

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Novels, Biographies, etc.; and smaller genres within the Gospels to include parables, sayings, controversy dialogues, healing miracles, exorcisms, nature miracles, etc." (*Biblical Genres and Form Criticism*). In other words, a "genre" is a type of literature, art, or music that possesses a particular form, style, or content.

Professor Just defines Form Criticism as "the branch of biblical studies that classifies the various literary genres, studies their features, and considers how and where such forms were actually used in the 'life setting' of the religious communities" (*Biblical Genres and Form Criticism*). He says that, "Just as modern biologists classify plants and animals into different classes, orders, families, genus, and species, biblical scholars do similar things in classifying each biblical text as part of a certain genre or sub-genre: they describe each genre or form, and study the characteristics that distinguish one form from another; they also consider when and where ancient Jews and/or Christians first used such materials" (*Biblical Genres and Form Criticism*).

**Major Genres of the Old Testament:** Fr. Just identifies several types of genres found in the Old Testament, otherwise known as the Hebrew Scriptures:

- **Foundational Myths & Legends:** Examples are stories about the origins of the world and the first generations of humans, intended to provide a foundational world-view upon which people base their communal and individual lives (Genesis)
- **Legal Codes:** Legal codes include collections of laws by which the people must live (Leviticus, Deuteronomy)
- **Genealogies:** These include lists of interrelationships between peoples, either of successive generations or of different nations (Numbers)
- **Annals:** Annals include semi-historical narrative accounts of select events in a nation's life, focusing especially upon political and military exploits of its leaders, since usually written under royal sponsorship (1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, etc.)
- **Prophetic Books:** Prophetic books include collections of the oracles or words of God spoken to the people through human intermediaries (prophets) and the symbolic actions performed by the prophets at God's direction for the people's benefit (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and more than a dozen others)
- **Psalms & Odes:** Examples include poetic lyrics of songs/hymns intended for public and private worship (Psalms)
- **Prayers:** Prayers are words addressed by people to God, especially reflecting situations

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of crisis or lament (Lamentations)

- **Proverbs:** Proverbs are generalized sayings and aphorisms containing advice on how to live well: "do good and avoid evil" (Proverbs)
- **Wisdom Literature:** Examples include various types of inspirational stories intended to encourage people to live wisely (Job, Wisdom, etc.)
- **Apocalypse:** These are symbolic narratives that interpret a historical crisis through God's eyes in order to provide hope for a better future (Daniel).

**Major Genres of the New Testament:** Fr. Just also identifies several genres found in the New Testament, that include:

- **Gospels:** Gospels are proclamations of the "good news" about Jesus intended to establish and/or strengthen people's faith in him; quasi-biographical, semi-historical portraits of the life, teachings, and actions of Jesus (Mark, Matthew, Luke, John)
- **Acts:** This form of text is a partial narrative account about the beginnings and the growth of early Christianity; it is not a complete history of the early Church, since it focuses only on the actions of a few missionary leaders (Acts), especially St. Peter and St. Paul.
- **Letters:** Sometimes called epistles. These are real letters addressing practical and theological issues relevant to particular communities (Paul's letters)
- **Church Orders:** These types of documents are collections of instructions for the practical organization of religious communities (1 Timothy, Titus)
- **Testament:** These are documents that give a dying person's last wishes and instructions for his or her successors (2 Timothy & 2 Peter)
- **Homily/Sermon:** This type of sermon cites and interprets older biblical texts in reference to Jesus (Hebrews)
- **Wisdom Collection:** This type is a collection of general instructions on how to live an ethical Christian life well (James)
- **Epistles/Encyclicals:** This is a more formal type of letter; examples are "circular letters" intended for broader audiences (1 & 2 Peter)

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- **Apocalypse:** This genre is a vividly symbolic narrative that "reveals" God's views about a historical crisis, in order to provide encouragement for a difficult present and hope for a better future (Rev.)

Biblical genres are important because we need to know the form or genre of a text if we are to get the meaning from it that the author intended. For example, the first twelve chapters of Genesis tell the truth of the Creation and Fall by using mythological genre, rather than exact historical or scientific descriptions of these events.

### *Redaction Criticism*

Fr. Hardon tells us that Redaction Criticism "goes beyond form criticism in analyzing how the biblical texts underwent development and change as they were used in different Gospel contexts" (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*). The method 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."

Those employing the method try to "ascertain how and why an author combined history, traditions, and stories to satisfy the needs to suit a particular audience. It 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." As Fr. Hardon suggested, sometimes redaction means to edit the original version of a text.

Another method is Canonical Criticism which is "an examination of the final form of the text as a totality, as well as the process leading to it. Whereas earlier methods of biblical criticism considered the origins, structure, and history of the text, Canonical Criticism is more concerned with questions of meaning, both for the community for which it was produced and which used it.

### *Feminist Criticism*

Susan Brayford, who is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Centenary College of Louisiana, states in an article "Reading "Glasses: Feminist Criticism":

Feminist biblical criticism, like feminism itself, comes in many types of packaging, each of which when opened reveals different ideas about the Bible, its authority, and its relevance. To interpret the Bible from any feminist lens, one must ask certain questions: what does

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the text say – or not say – about women; what do the characters – both male and female, human and divine – say about women; do these answers portray women as fully human (as the above quote advocates) or as subordinate to men; if the latter (which is more common), what is the appropriate response? This last question is the one that distinguishes the various feminist approaches to biblical interpretation. Contemporary feminist biblical criticism can trace its roots to the 1895 publication of *The Woman's Bible* by Elizabeth Cady Stanton who, along with her collaborators, condemned the Bible's use as a weapon that legitimated the oppression of women. However, feminist biblical critics were relatively silent until the 1970s, when scholars such as Phyllis Trible, Rosemary Ruether, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza began to challenge the exclusivity of "malestream" biblical scholarship. Since then, feminist interpreters have adopted at least three different lenses for reading the Bible, including those that I will term rejectionist, loyalist, and revisionist.

Feminists claim that the Bible was written by men who reflected a patriarchal prejudice regarding the subordinate role of women in society, so feminists have rewritten history to conform to their own ideological preconceptions. The French feminist Monique Wittig, stated in regard to writing history, "Remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent." This represents the view of reality and the truth held by most social radicals, including many radical feminists writers; that there exists no objective truth outside of one's mind; therefore one is justified in constructing reality in accordance with his or her own opinions. Their purpose is to make history not describe it. This is pure subjectivity! Brayford states, "[T]he Bible itself shows that laws and customs should be continually scrutinized and updated to correspond to different times, places, and customs. This, along with a feminist lens that requires a reader to ask questions about gender equality, allows all but the most rejectionist readers to keep their Bibles open."

### *Postmodernist Biblical Criticism*

Postmodernist Biblical Criticism treats the same general topics addressed in broader postmodernist scholarship, including author, autobiography, culture criticism, deconstruction, ethics, fantasy, gender, ideology, politics, postcolonialism, and so on. Those utilizing this method ask such questions as, "What are we to make, ethically speaking, of the program of ethnic cleansing described in the book of Joshua? What does the social construction of gender mean for the depiction of role and female roles in the Bible?" In textual criticism, "postmodernist criticism rejects the idea of an original text, and treats all manuscripts as equally valuable; in the 'higher criticism' it brings new perspectives to themes such as theology, Israelite history, hermeneutics and ethics." Quite frankly, I don't care much for most of the work of Postmodernist Biblical scholarship, because most of it is eisogistic, that is, the scholars impose their own prejudices on interpreting biblical texts. As a consequence, a lot of their conclusions are anti-Christian.

### *Other methods of biblical criticism*

Another method of biblical criticism is Canonical Criticism which is "an examination of the final form of the text as a totality, as well as the process leading to it. Whereas earlier methods of biblical criticism considered the origins, structure, and history of the text, Canonical Criticism is more concerned with questions of meaning, both for the community for which it was produced and which used it.

Other methods of biblical interpretation include Psychological Criticism and Socio-scientific Criticism. The former tries to ascertain 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." The latter, also known as socio-historical criticism and social-world criticism, employs the social sciences, especially psychology, anthropology and sociology to interpret the Bible. A typical study using this method or perspective "will draw on studies of contemporary nomadism, shamanism, tribalism, spirit-possession, millenarianism, etc. to illuminate similar passages described in biblical texts. Socioscientific criticism is thus concerned with the historical world *behind* the text rather than the historical world *in* the text." I don't place much worth on psychological interpretations of persons or events in the Bible, because it's difficult enough to understand people today using psychological methodologies, and besides which psychological perspective of the many available is one going to use. On the other hand, I think that there could be some value to using a sociological perspective, although there are several different approaches to sociology that would produce radically different interpretations.

### *Summary of the Historical-Critical method*

Biblical criticism begins with textual criticism, because scholars have to be certain as possible that they are dealing with the oldest and most accurate text possible; in other words, what the original authors wrote. This method is called the Lower Criticism. Once the originality of the text has been established, biblical scholars apply various methods of the Higher Criticism, such as Literary Criticism to understand it better. Literary Criticism is used to discover what forms or genres are contained in a text. A scholar can arrive at the correct interpretation of a text only if he knows the literary form in which it is written, such as is it poetry, prophecies, parables, and the like. And finally, when the text has been established and the form defined, the scholar applies historical criticism which involves ascertaining the authenticity and historicity of the text. By authenticity is meant that the text was, in fact, written by the author whose name it bears. By historicity is meant the confidence that can be had in the truth of what the author says and what are the limits of his testimony. For example, we need to know whether or not he was in a position to know the truth of the matter or if he had any preconceptions that affected his description of the facts.

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Scholars try to discover the historical veracity of a text by comparing it with other known evidence from such fields as history, geography, ethnology, and archaeology. This is the historical-critical method in a nutshell, but in practice it is extremely more complicated.

### Premises for Catholic Biblical Scholars

There are certain premises that Catholic biblical scholars must follow. Most genuine biblical scholars today, Catholic and Protestant, believe that Sacred Scripture is God's Word expressed in human terms. By genuine is meant that Catholic biblical scholars submit their findings to the Church's magisterium or teaching authority for evaluation. They believe that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, although most don't believe that God dictated the words of Sacred Scripture to secretaries. Instead, "God's people experienced [His] holy presence, learned [His] divine will and then found the means appropriate to them to express, under [His] inspiration, the truths of this revelation." The premises of the Historical-Critical Method for genuine Catholic biblical scholars are as follows:

- There exists a supernatural order and that there is a personal God who revealed himself and intervened in history.
- Jesus suffered, died, and was buried and that he is now risen from the dead, ascended into Heaven and will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- He and others performed miracles and made prophecies that came true.
- The Faith and historical truth are compatible.
- He has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit to lead us always into deeper truth.
- The Gospels have historical value.
- The Gospels are faith documents inspired by the Holy Spirit, are free from error, and written from a very specific point of view to deepen our faith and not necessarily to provide an exact historical treatment of Jesus' life.
- The Apostles were witnesses of the life of Jesus and they had considerable influence in the Church during its formative stages.
- Based on the above premises, the Historical-Critical method is used to separate the way the faith is expressed from the historical foundation.

Because many Scripture scholars, especially Protestant Scripture scholars, who employed the Historical-Critical method in the nineteenth century held premises that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Church was not favorable to Catholic scholars employing the method until well into the twentieth century when it became evident that the method could be of considerable value in more deeply understanding the Scriptures. The first Church document giving qualified acceptance of the method was Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1944

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followed by *Instruction on the Historicity of the Gospels* issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission on April 21, 1964. The Commission stressed three stages of the Gospels: 1) What Jesus said and did; 2) What the early church preached orally about Jesus; and 3) What the Evangelists wrote down in the Gospels. The principles found in the 1964 document were incorporated into Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)* in 1965 and the Pontifical Biblical Commission reaffirmed its approval of the Historical-Critical method in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* in 1993.

### Summary and Conclusion

We began the essay by discussing the three uses of the Bible: first, the Bible is a source of Divine Revelation; second, it is used in the Divine Liturgy; and third, it is a religious book to be used for one's personal spiritual life. Saint Jerome said "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." Then we discussed Divine Revelation and how it is found in both Sacred Scripture and Tradition. After explaining what these are, we stressed that the Catholic Church places equal weight on each of them as containing God's revelation. Our next topic was how to properly read and interpret the Holy Bible. During our discussion of this topic we emphasized that Catholics believe that God entrusted the task of interpreting Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition exclusively to the *magisterium* or teaching authority of the Catholic Church, otherwise there would be nothing but doctrinal chaos as is found in those churches that have rejected religious authority. The next topic that we considered was hermeneutics and exegesis, hermeneutics being the science of biblical interpretation and exegesis being the practice of interpreting the Bible. The meaning of inspiration of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation was our next subject followed by a consideration of the inerrancy of the Bible.

The Catholic Church has always maintained that it wrote the Bible, especially the New Testament, and that only the Church is protected by the Holy Spirit when interpreting the Bible. But as we said, even the Catholic Church has not found it easy to interpret the Bible for several reasons, such as: the text of the Bible might be difficult to readily understand; the Greek, Aramaic, and/or Hebrew in which the Bible was originally written is often difficult to translate into modern languages; and/or modern readers are often easily confused by ancient idioms or manners of speech used in the Bible; and/or the Bible contains ancient slang terms, cultural differences, and foreign theological concepts not readily recognized by moderns. Because of these difficulties, biblical scholars have to know a lot to correctly interpret the Bible, such as: they must be fluent in the ancient biblical languages; they must have a thorough knowledge of what the Church teaches about the Bible; they need to continually read many books and scholarly journals written by reputable Scripture scholars and theologians; they must make a thorough study of what the Church Fathers and Doctors of the Church had to say about the Bible; they need a deep knowledge and under-

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standing of the history of the times when the Scriptures were written; and they have to know a lot about archeology on biblical themes from books and scholarly articles.

Another subject we considered in the essay is the stress placed on the equality of the Word and the Eucharist since Vatican Council II. We also explained how the Gospels were written in stages, beginning with the life and teaching of Jesus; the stage of the oral tradition following his ascension into Heaven; and the stage when the tradition was written down by the Evangelists.

Following this, we considered guidelines the Church has given us for reading and interpreting the Holy Bible. These guidelines are important for all Catholics, including scholars and lay people alike. The Church instructs us that when reading and interpreting the Bible we should: first, be attentive to the content and unity of the entire Bible; second, we should read the Bible within the living tradition of the Church; and third, we should be attentive to the Analogy of Faith, which the Church defines as “the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation.” What this means is whenever a question of doctrine emerges, the Church always looks to the teachings that already exist to make certain that the answers provided resemble, are similar to, or comparable to the existing doctrines. As we said during our discussion, the Analogy of Faith provides boundaries within which Scripture can be properly understood and minimizes the practice of making wild speculations about the meaning of passages.

We also discussed the four senses of Scripture. According to an ancient tradition, we can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, tropological or moral, and anagogical senses, providing us with the four senses of Scripture. By the literal sense is meant word for word. It conveys the idea of a description of actual events; the description means what it says. But the Church has always held that underlying much of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is deeper spiritual meaning. This is where the three spiritual senses come in. By allegory is meant a method of indirect representation of ideas or truths, especially in literature or art. It is a literary form that tells a story in order to “present a truth or enforce a moral.” For example, the allegorical sense describes “How those things, events, or persons in the literal sense point to Christ and the Paschal Mystery.” Parables are a type of allegory regarding the tropological or moral sense, which derives from a word that means figurative language, and is applied to the moral content of the Bible. It is that aspect of the Bible that instructs us how to live holy and virtuous lives. Lastly, the anagogical sense deals with our final destiny and the last things: death, judgment, Purgatory, Heaven, and Hell. Beginning with the Church Fathers, the Church has always employed the four senses of Scripture, because Jesus himself used the method, followed by the Evangelists and St. Paul in his letters.

We also discussed typology in connection with the senses of scripture. By typology is meant the study of the unity of the Old and New Testaments. Typology has been defined as “a real person,

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place, thing, or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows [or prefigures] something greater in the New Testament.” In other words, a type is something in the Old Testament that points to or hints at something greater in the New Testament. For example, many of the persons in the Old Testament are “types” of Christ, such as Adam, Moses, and Isaac. Noah's Ark is a type of the Church. The waters of the Red Sea and of the Jordan River prefigure the waters of Baptism. That which a type prefigures is called the antitype. We gave a lot of examples during our discussion of this topic. The fact that a particular person or thing is a type can be known only by revelation, either from Holy Scripture or from Tradition, and only the Catholic Church can properly interpret the Bible on such matters.

Next we examined several ancient and modern translations of the Bible that were made over the centuries, especially of the ancient *Septuagint* or Greek translation of the Old Testament and of St. Jerome's fifth century A.D. *Latin Vulgate*. In regard to comparing Catholic and Protestant Bibles, we explained why Catholic Bibles contain seven more Old Testament books for a total of 46 than do Protestant Bibles that have only 39 books. Both have the same number of books in the New Testament. Many, if not most, Protestant translations are good ones, but we would caution Catholics to be careful about reading them, because the translation of certain words and the foot-notes often contain interpretations contrary to Catholic doctrines.

We spent quite a lot of space discussing the canon in the essay. The term canon means rule, norm, or guideline, and in this context means which books belong in the Bible and which do not. In other words, the Canon of the Bible is those books the Catholic Church decided are inspired by the Holy Spirit. The first major attempt by the Catholic Church to determine the Canon of Holy Scripture was at the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D., followed by the Council of Carthage in 397. The decrees on the Canon approved at the Council of Carthage were renewed at the Second Council of Carthage 419 AD and confirmed by Pope Boniface. The decisions made at Carthage were reaffirm-ed by the Council of Florence in 1442, under Pope Eugenius IV, and the Council of Trent in 1546.

As we stressed during our discussion, it is the Catholic Church we have to thank for the Bible, especially the New Testament. The Councils arrives at their decision by considering which books were used in the liturgies and catechesis from the beginning by the early principal dioceses, such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Alexandria, and Rome, churches all established by the Apostles themselves. Moreover, the Council approved as inspired books that had been considered canonical by all of the early Church Fathers. In regard to the Old Testament canon, the Church accepted the canon established by the Jews. However the final list of inspired books was selected, we have the Catholic Church to thank for the Bible. The Church existed before the Bible was written, she wrote the Bible, she selected the books for the Canon of the Bible, she preserves the Bible, she has transmitted it down through the ages, and only she is authorized to properly interpret it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

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We also discussed in some detail issues involved with translating the Bible. As we discussed, there are basically two translation philosophies: formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence. Other popular versions of the Bible in English are not truly translations, but are merely “paraphrases” of other translations instead. Formal Correspondence translations, also called Formal Equivalence translations, try to provide as literal of translations of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek wording of texts as possible. Translators using this philosophy try to stay as close to the original documents as possible by trying to maintain a lot of the original word order.

On the other hand, the goal of Dynamic Equivalence translations is to transfer the same message to the twentieth century reader that the original did to the original reader. Translators attempt to bring out the implications of figures of speech and other implications that were part of the intended meaning, but require special efforts to get across in English. These are obviously loose translations. Translators who use this method try to put the sense of the original text into the best possible modern languages, in our case English, while trying to remain close to the ideas expressed in the original Greek or Hebrew version as possible. According to this view, it does not matter whether the grammar and word order of the original is preserved in English so long as the meaning of the text is preserved.

Many Scripture scholars consider literal translations or Formal Correspondence translations good for in-depth academic study of the Bible, but they don't believe they are as suitable for the ordinary reader of the Bible, because they can be difficult to understand when heard or read aloud. Also, literal translations can be difficult to interpret in places, because the original Greek and Hebrew might not have modern equivalents. The disadvantage of dynamic translations is that they lose precision because they omit subtle cues to the meaning of a passage that only literal translations can convey. Also, dynamic translations make it easier for the translator to read his own doctrinal views into the translation.

After completing the discussion of that topic, we tried to answer the question of which are the best translations of the Bible for Catholics. For one, as we just suggested, we advise Catholics to read only Catholic editions of the Bible, mainly because Protestant Bibles tend to be translated with certain words that emphasize Protestant interpretations of doctrinal matters. Moreover, the footnotes also reinforce Protestant doctrinal interpretations. Aside from that, one's choice of a Bible depends on how he or she intends to use it. Biblical scholars advise us that if we intend to do serious scholarly Bible study, literal translations or Formal Equivalence translations are what we need. Translators using this philosophy try to stick close to the originals, even preserving much of the original word order. On the other hand, those of us who read the Bible primarily for spiritual nourishment might be better served by selecting a dynamic equivalence translation, which provides a more contemporary rendering of the text.

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The last topic that we considered in this essay was the Historical-Critical method of biblical interpretation. We spent a lot of space on this topic, because it is the main method of biblical interpretation in use today. Biblical criticism begins with textual criticism, because scholars have to be certain as possible that they are dealing with the oldest and most accurate text available; in other words, what the original authors wrote. This method is called the Lower Criticism. Once the originality of the text has been established, biblical scholars apply various methods of the Higher Criticism, such as Literary Criticism to understand it better. Literary Criticism is used to discover what forms or genres are contained in a text. A scholar can arrive at the correct interpretation of a text only if he knows the literary form in which it is written, such as is it poetry, prophecies, parables, and the like. And finally, when the text has been established and the form defined, the scholar applies historical criticism which involves ascertaining the authenticity and historicity of the text. By authenticity is meant that the text was, in fact, written by the author whose name it bears. By historicity is meant the confidence that can be had in the truth of what the author says and what are the limits of his testimony. For example, we need to know whether or not he was in a position to know the truth of the matter or if he had any preconceptions that affected his description of the facts. Scholars try to discover the historical veracity of a text by comparing it with other known evidence from such fields as history, geography, ethnology, and archaeology.

We used considerable space discussing the various tools used by the those biblical ,scholars who employ the Historical-Critical Method, such as: Source Criticism; Biblical Genres and Form Criticism; Redaction Criticism; Feminist Criticism; Postmodernist Biblical Criticism; and other methods of Biblical Criticism such as Sociological and Psychological Criticism. This is the Historical-Critical method in a nutshell, but in practice it is extremely more complicated.

The major theme of those biblical scholars who utilize the Historical-Critical method has been the Quest for the Historical Jesus. The quest for the historical Jesus has been defined as “the attempt to use historical rather than religious methods to construct a verifiable biography of Jesus.” Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) claimed in his *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906) that nineteenth century lives of Jesus revealed more of the author’s prejudices than about the life of Jesus. In other words, they believed that the evidence showed that the real Jesus, the Jesus of History that lived in the early first century, was not the same as the Christ of Faith that had developed among his late first century followers. What we find in the Gospels is not what the real Jesus said and did, but how his later followers interpreted these sayings and actions. We discuss the topic of biblical interpretation in some detail in our essay and radio program *Inter-pretng the Bible Through the Ages* located on this website.

Following our treatment of the Historical-Critical method of biblical interpretation, we considered how the Historical-Critical method has been applied to the interpretation of the *Pentateuch*, the Greek translation of the first five books of the Old Testament. For a long time it was believed

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that Moses was the principal author of the Pentateuch, but most modern biblical scholars for the last century or so believe that the composition of the first five books of the Bible is far more complex than this single authorship. What their research purports to show is that the final editing in the fifth century B.C. used materials from many different periods, some of them very ancient. The rearranged and rewritten text consisting of the first five books of the Bible was the version of the Bible that reached the Jews and Christians at the time of Jesus. It is this version that is known as the *Pentateuch*. Many, if not most biblical scholars, believe that the *Pentateuch* consists of four traditions blended together over a long period of time. Some scholars have identified the so-called Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly, and Deuteronomic strands that make up the first five books of the Bible. They are logically abbreviated as J, E, P and D. This approach is called the Graf-Wellhausen or Documentary Hypothesis, named after K.H. Graf and Julius Wellhausen, both nineteenth century German Lutheran biblical scholars. Most biblical scholars seem to follow some version of this hypothesis today. This hypothesis still provides the basis upon which more recent hypotheses are founded. Each tradition has its own theological viewpoint. We completed the essay by listing certain premises that Catholic biblical scholars must follow.

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