

The Hope of Catholic Biblical Interpretation: Progress and Gaps in the Manifestation of Scripture Since Vatican II¹

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Abstract

The results of Vatican II for the study of Scripture produced both expected and unexpected fruits. Those combined fruits provide the opportunity for some reflection on the current status of biblical scholarship in relation to the Church. This current status helps identify what we must appreciate and celebrate, but also helps identify remaining gaps to be filled. By assessing some of the gaps, the fruits of the second Vatican council are used to provide one way of approaching these remaining gaps, and charting a hopeful way ahead.

Keywords

biblical interpretation, Vatican II, Catholic Scripture studies, Catholic Biblical studies, exegetical method

Introduction

The subject of Vatican II and its contribution to Scripture is a complicated one that deserves many full treatments. The recent literature that has commemorated the council has done well to show our successes.² The intention here is simple; to briefly articulate some of the Vatican II contributions to Scripture, to reflect on where we are now, and to name

¹ This paper is a revised version of a lecture give Joint-Session Panel Discussion – Canadian Theological Society and Canadian Catholic Historical Association Congress of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Victoria, BC, 2013. *50 Years from Vatican II: @ the Edge/In the Margins*. In an unfortunate circumstance, Bishop Remi De Roo, one of the last surviving Council Fathers, was scheduled to lecture at this meeting. Due to a small medical issue, he was not able to attend and I was invited to offer a lecture on Vatican II and Scripture. With thanks to Ronald Witherup, SS for reading a post-presentation version of this paper and his valuable feedback.

² A full accounting, with some special attention to historical methodology, appears in Massimo Faggioli, “Council Vatican II: Bibliographical Survey 2010–2013,” *Cr St* 34 (2013) 927–955.

some of the challenges in moving ahead. It seems that Vatican II and the history leading to it, dances along the margins and edges, in a movement of both progress for the Church and a return to the sources. The focus here though, takes the position of gaps and gap filling. What gaps have been filled and what gaps remain? After brief historical observations and discussion regarding intentional contributions of the council to Scripture scholarship, the discussion shifts to some unexpected fruits of the council. These unexpected fruits are claimed as such since it is unlikely the council fathers intended them, but few would have little objection to those fruits that have enlivened the Church. The combination of these expected and unexpected fruits help identify the gaps that remain, and how these fruits act as a compass to address the remaining gaps.

History as Context

One way to understand the contribution of the council toward Scripture is to explore the contrasts and the similarities between its articulations of Scripture versus past ecclesial articulations. We could focus on the major movements from the anti-modernists statements and oaths of the early 1900's, or the teachings about Genesis in *Humani Generis* compared to the much different approach of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943, the latter document which Catholic biblical scholars see as the source of their freedom. Perhaps one could also discuss the shift in approach away from neo-scholasticistic and propositional models of divine revelation. Many of these features have been articulated elsewhere. For example, Carolyn Osiek's Society of Biblical Literature presidential address in 2006 provides some of this brief history.³ But to introduce the impact of Scripture scholarship in its modern forms I offer one historical event, a less well known one, roughly 20 years before the start of the council.⁴ It helps show what was at stake for Catholic biblical scholarship.

Consider the moment of our own viva voce or doctoral defenses. For some of us this is a close or far memory, for others an impending reality. But now place the defense in the context of mounting concerns over particular methods, in which your supervisor uses your defense to promote a controversial method. This is what occurred in 1938, with Cardinal Augustin Bea, SJ, the rector of the Biblical Institute, and Benjamin Wambacq's advisor. Yet this was no regular viva, given mounting concerns regarding the validity of histor-

³ Carolyn Osiek, "Catholic or catholic? Biblical Scholarship at the Center," *JBL* 125 (2006), pp. 5–22.

⁴ This event and its relevant historical background is outlined in Thomas Bolin, "Benjamin Wambacq O. Praem. At Vatican II," *Analecta Praemonstratensia* (2012): pp. 250–262.

ical methods and with the anti-modernist crisis still a close memory, Bea arranged for Wambacq's thesis defense in 1938 to become an opportunity for Papal approval on the work of the biblical institute and the development of modern biblical criticism in the Church. Bolin, who relays this account in a recent article on Wambacq, provides a striking image. The largest hall was chosen for the defense, and over 1200 observers attended. Wambacq stands, facing his committee, with the presence of the enthroned Pope Pius XI to his right on a raised platform. This was a staged event to send a message regarding modern biblical studies. Thankfully the defense was a success. Wambacq went on to become Consultor of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and later its under-secretary. This is a more positive event, yet there are more compelling and depressing ones like working through the diaries of Marie Joseph Lagrange and the criticism he took over progressing modern methods.⁵ While we have made amazing strides in how we read Scripture, and in the general freedom of exegesis, a pressing question is the continuing relationship of that scholarship to the Church. It is hoped that a reflection on the fruits of Vatican II can be applied to the future challenges and provide one way to think about this relationship.

The Expected Contributions of Vatican II

The contributions of Vatican II to Scripture scholarship are well known. In part, there are those contributions that were evident to those promoting them and intentionally being advocated before and during the council. They were developments informed by the emerging theology of the time, combined with the advancements in modern biblical scholarship,

⁵ Lagrange (1855–1938), who headed the *École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem* in its earliest years, frequently faced trouble for his position on things like challenging Mosaic authorship; his challenge is now basic fact. One of the elements that strike a reader most is his obedience and the internal struggle between the position of the Church and the truth he knew. We also note that he was years ahead of his time in Scripture scholarship. Some of his early articulations of Scripture, seem like they are informed by *Dei Verbum*: “We who love all that our times love of the beautiful and good, let us try to share with them our path. But the Bible could also become a battleground. On this battleground, we must not use a crossbow against a cannon; that is, we are invited to rival our adversaries in competence; to recognize in the Bible the word of man, written as history, and at the same time, to receive the Bible as the word of God, bearer of transcendence.” Bernard Montagnes, OP, *The Story of Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange: Founder of the Modern Catholic Bible Study* (New York: Paulist Press, New York, 2006), p. 29. Compare this quote with *Dei Verbum* #12 “However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, (6) the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate *what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.*” (my emphasis). Lagrange's word of God and word of man in a both-and construction is clearly echoed in DV.

and can be seen in the pre-conciliar works of those like Congar.⁶ While there are many such contributions, here we focus on two: Scripture as relational and the shifting roles and associated methods of exegeses.

The refocusing towards a relational approach of Scripture is perhaps best exemplified in a seemingly unrelated debate over truth. The core of the debate over how Scripture is inspired, and the relation of that inspiration to history telling, scientific knowledge, and truth claims, has at its core and conclusion a relational focus; for the question of inspiration is to ask how God invites us into a relationship.⁷ The advent of modern biblical scholarship and especially the developments in critical theory in German Protestant scholarship pushed the Church for years before the council. In part these debates arose when the council was to articulate inerrancy, and what form that expression would take. An example well known among most Scripture scholars is in *Dei Verbum*

“Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings (5) for the sake of salvation.” (my emphasis).⁸

It is helpful that we have access to the multiple proposed formulas before this final version. An understanding of what was proposed versus the final version, better solidifies the intention and meaning of that final version. First we must consider the choice of the term “truth” (*veritas*). Yet “truth” in one of the earlier formulations was expressed differently as solely “inerrantia” with qualification in a different direction.⁹ The second part of proposition, in some of the older formulations, sought to define that inerrancy. This took on the form of inerrancy in matters sacred and in “*veritas profanae*” that is, truth dealing with science and especially history. One can only imagine where we would be if the Council had left this formula. It was a formula that placed inspiration in the realm of history and science and in that way, represented Scripture as a propositional text in all matters.

⁶ For example, consider the historically informed exegetical approach of Congar sometimes characterized by the *nouvelle théologie* or *ressourcement* and his biblical exploration of the Holy Spirit through Scripture: Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Trans. David Smith; New York: Herder and Herder, 1983), pp. 3–57.

⁷ This was understood well by Schökel (1920–1998), when he relates the theology of inspiration to the incarnation. “Whatever of revelation and grace is contained in the inspired word, accrues to it because it has been assumed by the divine word to man become incarnate in a word truly human”. Luis Alonso Schökel, *The Inspired Word: Scripture in Light of Language and Literature* (Trans. Francis Martin; New York, Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 87.

⁸ *Dei Verbum* #11. For a recent discussion of this document see Ronald Witherup, *The Word of God at Vatican II: Exploring Dei Verbum* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

⁹ Alois Grillmeier, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol III, p. 19ff.

The shift though is evident in the final formula and centering error not around history, but around the concept of truth. A limited “inerrancy” was mitigated by the broader concept of “truth” and the “truth” was given a definition. By dropping inerrancy in matters sacred and profane, truth was then defined as: “for the sake of our salvation”. Rather than producing a formula to defend a particular view of Scripture, the Fathers asked what the function of Scripture is. The shift was made to the aim of inspiration and to its ultimate goal; to better see the work of God in the lives of the faithful and the role of God’s Word calling us into relationship with God.¹⁰ Whether that was done through story/myth (Jonah) or forms of remembered theological history (aspects of the Deuteronomistic History running from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings), the Church now allowed God to use any form God pleased to communicate the message of salvation and to advance a relationship with humanity. The movement from propositional textbook to an invitation into relationship is an important step in the Church’s approach to the divine word and reflects well the vision of Acts 8:26–40.¹¹ This relational understanding of revelation is communicated in the opening of *Dei Verbum*: “the invisible God . . . from the fullness of his love, addresses men and women as his friends . . . and lives among them . . . in order to invite and receive them into his own company”.¹² That relational understanding, and the battle of inspiration at its centre, is likewise given expression in DV #13, where inspiration is incarnational.

This achieved an important development in terms of understanding the many cultural envelopes in which Scripture is communicated. A close study of the ebbs and flows of any topic throughout Scripture clearly shows the pushing and pulling, the revision and the rethought of expressions like the place of the foreigner in the community, divine

¹⁰ We can perhaps trace the moment of this change. On Oct 2nd 1964, a speech by Cardinal König pointed out historical inaccuracies thanks to oriental, ancient Near Eastern studies, and a historical awareness thanks to scholarship; ex: Mt 2:26 vs 1 Sam 21:1 and the contradiction between Abithar according to Matthew, but Abimelech according to Samuel. There are now many more significant examples, and current discussions that only address minor discrepancies are not dealing with the main issues modern scholarship has provided. For example, one could consider the clear development into monotheism evident in the Hebrew Bible, and the reality of early polytheistic expression in the Hebrew Bible versus later monotheistic expressions of Second-Isaiah. For example see, Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹¹ The solution was one that features in many aspects of Vatican II. As opposed to the top down approach to ecclesiology, more co-dependant models surfaced. Likewise, the shift was also related to wider ideas underpinning *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium* and thus shifted from the ad intra focus to an ad extra focus.

¹² DV #2; Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 33. Here Gaillardetz and Clifford’s translation is slightly different towards a more inclusive translation that captures the point of the relational model.

violence, and other expressions.¹³ Revelation is a constant witness to this developing relationship where humanity perceives God shaped by their historical circumstances at any given time. This relational understanding of God's Word in Human Words implies a process of divine revelation where one cannot expect a particular moment in that history, or a particular text by itself, to contain the fullness of revelation. One text is only a single picture of YHWH's progressive relationship with Israel and with us. Hence "This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testament are like a mirror in which the pilgrim church on earth looks at God" (DV # 7). This is especially helpful for an OT scholar speaking to the church, wrestling with the realities of a polytheistic Israelite religion or violent texts of the OT.

A second factor that was an expected, or a hoped for outcome, involved a reconsideration of Scripture in the Church regarding the roles and tasks of those who study it. Closely related to how the truth of Scripture was now expressed, the second outcome opens the possibility for an interaction with that truth in a relational way.¹⁴ Vatican II centered Scripture in the life of the Church, and did so by giving Scripture authority over the "Christian Church at all times".¹⁵ This is confirmed after the Council, where Ratzinger compares early 19th century statements in *Humani Generis* and article 10 of *Dei Verbum*. He states:

"For the first time a text of the teaching office expressly points out the subordination of the teaching office to the word; its function as servant" [Later on that same page, Ratzinger says] "it (the teaching office) must constantly take up an attitude of openness towards the sources . . . not in the sense of "taking them into custody", but as a faithful servant who wards off attempts both against modernism and against traditionalism".¹⁶

¹³ For example, we see a development in the understanding of Yahweh's kingship, where it begins in a limited geographical sense and is expressed in terms of a warrior king fighting for Israel. Later, the violent elements of Yahweh's kingship subside and take on the expression of a universal creator king. Shawn W. Flynn, *YHWH is King: The Development of Divine Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Vetus Testamentum Supplements 159; Leiden: Brill, 2014).

¹⁴ The orientation of inspiration and truth to a relationship then implies all the patience and work of cultivating relationships. This leads to an increased exegetical freedom as well as increasing responsibility. For Barthélemy true freedom: "can only be gained by a demanding, patient, and lucid search for truth"; Dominique Barthélemy, "The Responsibility of the Theologian," *Dominican Ashram* 10.2 (1991), p. 69.

¹⁵ "Actualization, therefore, cannot mean manipulation of the text. It is not a matter of projecting novel opinions or ideologies upon the biblical writings, but of sincerely seeking to discover what the text has to say at the present time. The text of the Bible has authority over the Christian church at all times, and, although centuries have passed since the time of its composition, the text retains its role of privileged guide not open to manipulation." (*The Interpretation of the Bible and the Church*, 1994)

¹⁶ DV #10; Joseph Ratzinger, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol III, p. 197.

The result for us, as scholars, is rather simple and one we cannot take for granted.

By extension, if the Scripture is the source, the methods to study what that source has to teach us and how those studying it go about the task, also needed refinement. Ratzinger then reflects on the role of the theologian. Their task is not only to explain what the teaching office has said but to challenge the Church to return to the source of revelation. For Ratzinger, the alternative, theologians as solely apologists, is problematic: “to reduce the task of theology to the proof of presence of the statements of the teaching office, is to threaten the primacy of the sources, . . . which would ultimately destroy the serving character of the teaching office”.¹⁷ The subtle background to this is the fiery debate over the sufficiency of Scripture: questions such as whether Scripture or Tradition are complementary, one should be placed over the other, and a myriad of other suggestions. Yet the council took the approach of both Scripture and Tradition as a unified source of revelation.¹⁸ The early approach Benedict shows a theologian/Scripture scholar’s role in relation to that source. Thus, scholarship is involved in the process of helping protect Scripture from both modernism and traditionalism. Put another way, we have as our aim, the task of revealing the beauty of Scripture to those that hope for the kingdom, along with those Catholics who desire communion.¹⁹

Since the role of Scripture scholars was not only to defend Church doctrine but also to explore the sources and discover what they can teach the Church, the methods related to this *resourcement* received attention. *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) before the council and the *Interpretation of the Bible and the Church* (1993) drawing from the council, encourage the use of various methodologies that were no longer a threat, but valid ways to explore that revelation. No longer would Catholic exegetes have as much concern about using a crossbow against a cannon, (as Lagrange put it) but multiple methods are now at our disposal. Primary among these, despite some recent attacks against it, historical criticism remains “indispensable”²⁰ and the primary means of determining the

¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol III, p. 197.

¹⁸ The answer now is clearer in DV # 9 “Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end.” In part this was a response to the schema *De fontibus revelationis*. Another example of this is the placement given to Scripture in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #24 and #51. These paragraphs deal with the increased role of Scripture in the liturgy, and the importance of Scripture more broadly in the life of the Church.

¹⁹ The distinction between kingdom and communion Catholics is a helpful way out of the liberal conservation divide. See Timothy Radcliffe, *What is the Point of Being Christian?* (New York: Burns & Oates, 2005), pp. 164–178.

²⁰ “The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts.” (*Interpretation of the Bible and the Church*, I. A).

literal sense on which any spiritual application is based.²¹ Yet coupled with this historical approach, the council was always clear about the literal sense's constant relationship with the spiritual senses of the text. The primary goal of exegesis, and highlighted in *Verbum Domini* #29–49, includes historical work that should move towards the connection of that work “for the sake of our salvation”.²²

Vatican II and Today: Unexpected Fruits

There were also many unexpected fruits from the council. These are “unexpected” in part because these goals were not explicitly articulated, nor were they part of the focus for those pre-conciliar theologians that largely shaped the council, but in retrospect the results are easy enough to see. If the purpose of Scripture is for the sake of our salvation and thus to call us into a deeper relationship with God, and Scripture is meant to be shared with and by the entire Church as the people of God, it is perhaps not surprising to see what would happen. One quite unexpected result was the watershed increase in the roles of laity and women becoming Scripture scholars. One need only think of the laity who currently teach in seminaries, advise bishops, and take on many ecclesial tasks in their areas of theological expertise. The laity's achievement in scholarship paved the way for lay roles in the Church now experienced at the parish and diocesan levels. This is particularly a reality in the increased role of women, both consecrated and not, in becoming Scripture scholars. As Carolyn Osiek relates, in her SBL presidential address:

²¹ This exegetical freedom, is described by the NT scholar Friedrich Maier, as Moses on Mt. Nebo gazing on the promised land of exegesis which Maier feared would never be a reality in his time. Of Friedrich Wilhelm Maier, Benedict relays the event of this author's banned work on the synoptics, when Benedict was his student: “He never quite got over the humiliation of 1912, notwithstanding the fact that he could now teach his subject practically without restrictions and was supported by the enthusiasm of his students, to whom he was able to transmit his passion for the New Testament and a correct interpretation of it. From time to time in his lessons, recollections of the past came up. I was especially impressed by a statement he made in 1948 or 1949. He said that by then, as a historian, he could freely follow his conscience, but that he had not yet arrived at that complete freedom of exegesis of which he had dreamed. He said, furthermore, that he probably would not live to see this but that he desired at least, like Moses on Mount Nebo, to be able to gaze upon the Promised Land of an exegesis freed from every control and conditioning of the Magisterium.” Joseph Ratzinger, “Relationship between the Magisterium and Exegetes” Address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission On the 100th anniversary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. May 10th 2003.

²² This reality calls for a greater relationship between the theological and the historical. “However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended (which we have done so well), and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.” DV #12.

“In 1947, Sister Kathryn Sullivan, R.S.C.J., professor of history at Manhattanville College, tutored and self-taught in Scripture because no Catholic faculty at the time would have admitted a woman, became the first woman elected to membership. She was elected vice-president in 1958, an office from which she would normally have succeeded to the presidency, had they dared at the time to elect a woman as president. The first woman president of the CBA was not to come until 1986, Pheme Perkins, predating by a year the first woman president of SBL.”²³

This was clearly an unexpected result. Not only was the general assumption in Vatican II documents that the “exegetes” were clerics, but there was certainly very little consideration for the role of the female biblical exegete. In the language of the Vatican documents on Scripture one sees constant reference or assumption to the male exegete.²⁴ I am always surprised when asking a class to pick out limitations of such a statement, that few students note the gender distinction. Either way, it is an unexpected success since it provides a whole new series of reading lenses to the text that may not have found a voice. At very least, one can think here of the treatment on Feminism, in the *Interpretation of the Bible and the Church*, which at least opens it as a hermeneutical approach or stance whereby a neglected or overlooked perspective from women towards the Bible comes to fruition.²⁵

To go further to the margins of these successes, is one feature that is only now being realized. Ecumenism was always at the heart of the council, and received its anchor in *Gaudium et Spes*. Specifically, *Dei Verbum* #22 calls for some co-operation regarding bible translation and making Scripture broadly available to Christians. That ecumenical opening, now led to a consequence that has not been foreseen: the convergence of methods in exegesis and its theological application across

²³ Carolyn Osiek “Catholic or catholic? Biblical scholarship at the Center,” *JBL* 125.1 (2006), pp. 5–22. To this could be added the observations of Carolyn Osiek’s SBL presidential address. In it she discusses some potential developments of the fuller sense particularly in regards to women’s readings.

²⁴ In an older text, and in one of the most beautiful messages to biblical scholars, the Church says: “Having expounded and recommended those things which are required for the adaptation of Scripture studies to the necessities of the day, it remains, Venerable Brethren and beloved sons, that to biblical scholars who are devoted sons of the Church and follow faithfully her teaching and direction, We address with paternal affection, not only Our congratulations that they have been chosen and called to so sublime an office, but also Our encouragement to continue with ever renewed vigor with all zeal and care, the work so happily begun.” *Divino Afflante Spiritu* # 59.

²⁵ With thanks to Ronald Witherup for this understanding. In relation to the gender discussion is the place of the laity. As far as I can tell, the impact of Scripture studies in such texts is interpreted primarily for seminarians. Here consider *Optatum Totius* #16, attempting to reorient the important place of biblical languages in the study of Scripture. While the Scripture curriculum is strong for seminarians, the study of biblical languages has not become a reality for most seminarians, only for seminarians and lay who go into professional biblical scholarship.

ecumenical divides. There has been an interesting effect that expands beyond Scripture to ecumenical dialogue, not necessarily solely the credit of Vatican II, but one that is likely a simultaneous convergence of methods thanks in part to Vatican II. This is the unique convergence that is occurring between Protestant and Catholic biblical studies. While Protestant and Catholic²⁶ scholars have been working together for some time on a series of technical areas (Dead Sea Scrolls, text-criticism, and all exegetical work in the form of biblical commentaries), the unique convergence is how technical Scripture scholarship is married with different faith communities.

The evangelical Christian community has struggled with fundamentalism in its own way, particularly biblical fundamentalism. In a similar way, the Catholic approach has had to address this fundamentalism. Because of their co-working in technical aspects, there has been a convergence in how each group theologically expresses Scripture to address the realities of fundamentalism in their own faith communities. Unlike Canada and Europe, (who are by no means immune to fundamentalism) the most suitable example to draw out this work is in American biblical circles, which is informed by a particular politics and a historical context.

One recent example is the situation between Peter Enns (an Old Testament scholar) and Westminster Theological Seminary. Enns was let go from his tenured position, in particular for a book he had written that claimed an approach to Scripture via analogy of the Incarnation, given Scripture's obvious human element that modern scholarship has revealed, in *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (2005).²⁷ In a long battle, the book was deemed against the Westminster Confession. What occurred was 2 years of faculty meetings to discuss the book, overseen by the president personally, in which the faculty finally approved the work. Yet after this the board suspended Enns, leading to a significant amount of board members resigning over the issue. Another scholar who did not face a situation like this, but whose work is also historically informed and theologically relevant, is Kenton Sparks. Sparks is a trained scholar of the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible and takes the relationship of that work to faith and the life of the Church seriously. This resulted in a book *God's Word in Human Words*, (2008) in which he often references that Catholic position

²⁶ This is of course not to ignore the vast Jewish contribution. In its own way, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scripture* (2002), by the IBC, has begun to open the discussion with that community.

²⁷ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

and *Dei Verbum* as a compass for his own thoughts.²⁸ In particular, he describes accepting the reality of human language in the divine context and that such acceptance is not detrimental to inspiration, but essential. Both Enns and Sparks share the historical concern, the results of critical biblical scholarship, as well as the importance those areas have to questions of inspiration and how those realities enhance rather than detract from the faith. While the task here is not to offer an extensive analysis of their conclusions and where they correspond and diverge from the current Catholic articulation, that work should be taken up.

When I read their work, especially their work on the conversation between faith and scholarship, or the analogy of the incarnation to understand the function of Scripture as divine word but at the same time respecting the historical ways God speaks through human cultures, their conclusions are remarkably close to Vatican II's articulation of the place of Scripture as the word of God, the relationship of that belief to modern methods, the role of human authors, the importance of many critical methods, and the importance for critical scholarship to have a voice in how that relationship is articulated. Much more can be said about the convergence, and it deserves to be studied. One must look into the simultaneous conclusions between Catholic biblical studies and biblical studies in other denominational contexts. Regardless, it is clearly an unexpected result. We are seeing more unity in Catholic and some Protestant circles, in how to express revelation and inerrancy, because of the co-work in more technical areas that have real effects on questions of revelation and inspiration. This unexpected convergence is a point of encouragement for the future of scholarship. But especially, it provides some unique opportunities for ecumenical discussion, if we have similar visions of how we approach Scripture, what effect will that have on our theological articulations that are currently disparate.²⁹

²⁸ Kenton Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

²⁹ The historical source of DV and its many advances in Scripture study, while clearly due to advances in biblical scholarship, only found official expression at the council because of a sub-commission of the Secretariat for Christianity Unity, who were approaching the realities of Scripture through the lens of ecumenical dialogue, and thus responding to the problematic propositional model of the Theological Commission. The SCU thus drafted the 1961 schema, four years before DV, called *De Verbo Dei: Schema decreti pastoralis*. This officially shifted the discussion and added elements that basically appear in DV such as: Scripture as salvation not as dogmatic propositions, Scripture/Tradition above the Church, the validity of biblical scholarship (because of the commission's ecumenical sensitivities), etc. It is thus notable that an ecumenical awareness was an early motivator for a rearticulating of theology, which in the end resulted in a more cohesive expression of inspiration across denominations.

Where We Have Left to Go: Gaps and Filling the Gaps

Despite the expected and unexpected fruits of the council (only some of these enumerated here) there remain some gaps and challenges to address. How can the past gains be used to understand and to approach the future challenges? There is no time to discuss these problems in detail, but perhaps one of the gaps left to fill is the combined problem of an increasing conservatism and increasing specialization related to how modern methods are perceived to be divorced from the life of faith. For example, specific Catholic biblical scholarship has had a hard time incorporating the implications of Church teaching regarding historical methods.³⁰ Then there has been a clear response, in the warning against fundamentalism in documents like *The Interpretation of the Bible and the Church* and reinforced in *Verbum Domini*.³¹ Also consider the response by Catholic biblical scholars in titles such as “Biblical Fundamentalism: What Every Catholic Should Know?”³² and “In Defense of Historical Critical-Method”.³³ Witherup’s and Fitzmyer’s works respond to the trend towards a fundamentalism in biblical studies that does not inherit the legacy and fruits of the council. This trend is evident in other areas of the Church as well.

The second point is on specialization, I offer one example. At the 2009 CBA meeting, (while primarily American, it does gather an

³⁰ Examples are the entries on Isaiah and Moses in Scott Hahn (ed.) *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 2009). While the authors of each article are curiously not named, the entries on Genesis and Isaiah are particularly revealing. For example, in “Isaiah”, the overwhelming critical fact of at least three stages in the book’s composition, is placed in hypothetical language and is suspected as opposed to “tradition” followed by arguments for sole authorship: “if one is open to the possibility of true prophecy” (p. 399). Among the host of other issues with this articulation of the book of Isaiah, the very basic misunderstanding of Israelite prophecy as predication is misplaced. The Israelite prophets at times match their ancient context, but predominately move away from prediction in their historical context (like heptoscopy and visions due to drunkenness to predict the result of war) to a uniquely Israelite vision of prophecy as reflection on the covenantal relationship in light of current affairs. In this progression away from predication, one clearly sees the movement of God in Israel towards prophets who speak of relationship. The discussion on Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch does not fair much better for a critical capacity or any ability to understand very basic conclusions of scholarship and how faith can benefit from them.

³¹ While Benedict has always reminded the Church of the hermeneutic of faith, he has never thrown out historical criticism as essential and foundational, he only wishes to place it in its proper proportions: “Before all else, we need to acknowledge the benefits that historical-critical exegesis and other recently-developed methods of textual analysis have brought to the life of the Church” (VD #32). He also does not understand the method as narrow. We could easily debate how much control the fruits of the historical-critical method should have in guarding actualizations, but the debate for the Church, is not whether the method should be used.

³² Ronald Witherup, *Biblical Fundamentalism: What Every Catholic Should Know* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001).

³³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, *The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical-Critical Method* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2008).

international group of biblical scholars) the Divinity in Ancient Israel group meet with the Gospels group, to see if there were some ways they could discuss across disciplines. Understandably certain sensibilities will cringe at the last sentence while others will see it as normal. Here in lies the challenge. This, if you will, “inter-religious” dialogue of OT and NT scholars within one faith tradition, is striking. The increasing specialization and distance of Scripture scholarship away from theological study has led to a gap among both the presbyters and the faithful in understanding the fruits of scholarship born from the council.³⁴

With some examples such as specialization without connection and the issue of fundamentalism, the further realization of Vatican II’s understanding of Scripture in the Church will in part be determined by who fills the gaps and how. In that process of gap filling, some of the fruits discussed above might provide a compass. For example, the above has observed, in a very cursory fashion, that we have learned to understand Scripture as relational, and also the role of method, and that we are not to allow modernism or fundamentalism to take over the task. We have also noted the role of women and laity in the task and convergence in various Christian circles. Perhaps these fruits can be adopted for the continuing process of what we must do.

First attending to the relational aspect of revelation and the roles and approaches of those who study it, can address both specialization and fundamentalism. Moving beyond a propositional textbook, it is safe to suggest that any of the above groups have perceived that their academic study has invited them into a relationship, both with Christ and with the Church. Thus scholars cannot forget, whether they are popular scholars, historical scholars, or confessional scholars (for a lack of other suitable designations), that the Church, and this includes non-scholarly laity becoming apologists and some Bishops who are increasingly not receiving higher education, also want to be invited into the divine relationship. The issue becomes, when the presentation of our disciplines and the way we have experienced that very real relationship with Christ through intellectual study, does not also make the connection to others we address. We need to work at creating more connections between our work and the work of others, in order to bridge the gap between the different modes in which people’s relationship with Christ is accessed. This combats the false perception of specialization as a problem in and of itself, and at the same time fills a gap that need not be filled by fundamentalism. As we promote multiple methods to study the biblical text we must also be sensitive to the multiple modes

³⁴ Of course specialization is important and necessary. It is only when such specialization remain unconnected, or specifically, the specialist scholar devotes no time to connections. A positive example against this problem is Cardinal Martini. In him we saw competent NT text critic who was strong on biblical renewal through *lectio divina*.

through which people and communities access their relationships with God. Our intellectual model must be complementary not combative.

This then relates to the point of Vatican II's shift in the roles and approaches of studying Scripture. The role of scholars to challenge the Church to return to the source of revelation and its content is something that the Church will need to wrestle with more. At the same time, nothing will be gained if that challenge always takes on a combative form, or a form in which the faith underpinning historical studies is so hidden, that connections cannot be made between the historical work and faith. Thus, the Church must continue to employ qualified Scripture scholars (lay and ordained) in the task while trusting the fruits of Vatican II. To study the sources, and to allow it to determine the task, implies that something of truth and beauty will be seen in those methods, and that a listening and a dialogue will take place. At the same time, this will only be helpful if Scripture scholarship is at strategic moments, attentive to the types of questions that the magisterium, the local bishops, and the curia are interested to have more assistance on. This does not mean that valuable academic publication time must be spent on popular questions, but it does mean (and this already happens) that in the classroom and in the parishes, biblical scholars should be actively communicating the fruits and theological (or even relational) aspects of their expertise.

This might involve commenting on a recent movie, news item, or assisting in resources for parishes and schools, making more bridges in the classroom between academic study and faith, or having an active popular lecture schedule. One can see the unfortunate results when these gaps are filled by those unqualified to do so. I am not suggesting this work is not being done, but we must give more attention to that work and avoid the perception that there is an inescapable chasm between historical critical scholarship and the Church. Again, these considerations have the potential to dispel false charges against specialization, give it opportunity for connection, but also fill a gap by those suited for the task rather than allowing fundamentalism to take root.

Now what can the unexpected fruits of the roles of women and laity and the unexpected convergence between Protestant and Catholic Scripture scholarship teach us? The Church, through inviting unexpected voices into the conversation, has learned and grown. Perhaps, we as scholars, like the Church of Vatican II, are embarking on ways to make connections to those who are not part of the scholarly conversation. In that process, there may be the unexpected result of inviting them into the conversation as well. The two unexpected features teach us that new conversation partners in the process of Scriptural interpretation and communication is an important feature of growth. This aspect fits quite well with the second Vatican Council's reflection on the relationship of the Church to the modern world. This lesson of new conversation partners can help all involved. First, for scholars, it can reinforce some

of the above points. What are questions that the laity in the pews, or bishops in their dioceses, interested in? How can part of my scholarly task, be devoted to those questions, even if to me they seem simplistic or misplaced? What merit do those questions have and how can I respond in a way helpful to their needs?

Conclusion

The vision laid out above is slightly idealistic, and does not do the job of noting all the potential difficulties in continuing the work of Vatican II and addressing the gaps. Yet an approach of division, negative criticism, and bitterness, is not the way forward. The fruits of the second Vatican Council for the study of Scripture, are as relevant to the gaps of that time as they are to our own. The great challenge for Scripture scholarship today is making the valid connections between the academic discipline, other theological disciplines, and the life of faith in the Church while showing again the value of specialization that is able to make connections and dispel fundamentalism. We should draw attention to those who are doing it well, correct those who are being too simplistic and ignoring exegesis in favor of fundamentalism, and look for increased ways to foster the connections. From the perspective of a young scholar, we are entering the promised land, and Maier's realization of what is possible will be more than he could have dreamed.

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