

PRINCIPLES OF EXEGESIS: TOWARD A PARTICIPATORY BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Matthew Levering

I. INTRODUCTION

Much has been said about theological biblical exegesis, but how to make such proposals practicable?¹ Theological exegesis appears to lack a significant place in the biblical guild in part because, unlike historical-critical exegesis, it lacks a set of core principles that can be effectively implemented in the training of doctoral students and in the direction of research. In this light, recent efforts to advance principles of exegesis are particularly promising because of their concrete and constructive character. The first section of this article will set forth two recent proposals for principles of exegesis: Gerald O'Collins and Daniel Kendall's *The Bible for Theology: Ten Principles for the Theological Use of Scripture* and the Princeton Scripture Project's *The Art of Reading Scripture*. In light of the strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches, the second section of the article presents the contribution of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, whose

Prof. Matthew Levering, Associate Professor of Theology, Ave Maria University, 5050 Ave Maria Blvd., Ave Maria, FL 34142-9505. E-mail: matthew.levering@avemaria.edu

1. See Richard B. Hays, "Reading Scripture in the Light of the Resurrection," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 216–38; John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Colin Gunton, "Martin Kähler Revisited: Variations on Hebrews 4:15," *Ex Auditu* 14 (1998): 21–30; Adrian Walker, "Editorial: Fundamentalism and the Catholicity of Truth," *Communio* 29 (2002): 5–27; Robert L. Wilken, "In Dominico Eloquio: Learning the Lord's Style of Language," *Communio* 24 (1997): 846–66; Wilken, "Wilken's Response to Hays," *Communio* 25 (1998): 529–31; Joel B. Green, "Rethinking History (and Theology)," in

value for renewing theological exegesis has been somewhat overlooked.² I conclude by offering my own set of principles for a “participatory biblical exegesis,” in hopes of outlining a practicable program that takes up the strengths of the other approaches.

II. O’COLLINS AND KENDALL’S *THE BIBLE FOR THEOLOGY*

The Jesuit theologians Gerald O’Collins and Daniel Kendall aim at determining how Catholic theologians should understand and use Scripture, in the context of the disciplinary distinction between systematic/moral theology on the one hand and historical-critical biblical exegesis on the other. They ask, “What effect should biblical texts produce in theology? What does it mean for theologians to read, understand, interpret, and apply the scriptures?”³ Affirming the distinction between theologians and exegetes

Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 237–42. See also the volumes in the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible series, edited by R. R. Reno; for largely critical discussion of the first volume of that series, Jaroslav Pelikan’s *Acts*, see the responses by John Behr, Brian E. Daley, S.J., and C. Kavin Rowe and Richard B. Hays in a symposium in *Pro Ecclesia* 16 (2007): 14–32. In *Participatory Biblical Exegesis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming), I suggest that what is needed is an understanding of “history” that goes beyond the notion of history as an enclosed (strictly linear) set of temporal moments, a notion grounded metaphysically in fourteenth-century nominalism. Pace this view of history as strictly linear, human agency is both a linear and a participatory reality insofar as human agency belongs within the metaphysical and Christological/pneumatological participation of human persons in God. Thus time unfolds in such a way that past, present, and future are not closed off from each other; what is past participates in the present fulfillment, and all history participates in the eschatological fulfillment that is to come. I attempt to put this into practice in *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, forthcoming).

2. See Joseph Ratzinger’s essay, written before his election as Pope Benedict XVI, “Is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* Up-to-Date? Reflections Ten Years after Its Publication,” in Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005): 142–65, especially 146–53. Ratzinger observes that the Christian exegete must “take into account, as he interprets, the final Authority whom he knows to be active therein. Only then can we speak of theological interpretation, which of course does not cancel out historical interpretation, but rather broadens it so as to indicate a new dimension. Based on such insights, the *Catechism* has described the twofold character of correct biblical interpretation, which, on the one hand, includes the typical procedures of historical interpretation but which then—if these literary works are considered to be *one* book, and a holy book at that—must also be supplemented by further methodological forms” (149). See also Ignace de la Potterie, “The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: The Section on Sacred Scripture,” *Communio* 21 (1994): 450–60; cf. William S. Kurz, S.J., and Kevin E. Miller, “The Use of Scripture in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,” *Communio* 23 (1996): 480–507.

3. Gerald O’Collins, S.J., and Daniel Kendall, S.J., *The Bible for Theology: Ten Principles for the Theological Use of Scripture* (New York: Paulist, 1997), 2. Cf. the appreciative remark by Joel B. Green and Max Turner in their “New Testament Commentary and Systematic Theology: Strangers or Friends?” in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1. *Be-*

as well as the centrality and authority of the Bible for the theological task, they wish to explore what theologians should do both with biblical texts read in themselves and with the results of professional biblical exegesis.

Before fully embarking on this project, O'Collins and Kendall provide an introduction that situates their principles within their broader theological perspective. Guided by faith in Christ, they note that "[i]t is because the revealing and inspiring God speaks through all these texts that they constitute the authoritative account and interpretation of Israel's history and the formation of Christianity through Jesus Christ and his earthly followers."⁴ The Scriptures, as a closed canon, possess a normative authority that, beyond a merely functional authority based upon beneficent effects, derives from Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the apostolic witness. All scriptural texts, even those that appear today to reflect oppressive attitudes, are revelatory, if only as cautionary texts against sinful modes of behavior. The Word of God speaks to us through inspired, though also "historically and culturally conditioned," human words.⁵

Thus the meaning intended by the human author is important to discern, although one must recognize the difficulty of determining and expressing this intended meaning, perhaps highly complex, with exactitude; and one must likewise take into account the ways that the reader interacting with the actual text may uncover meanings in the text that were not consciously known to the author yet belong to the text. The patristic period constitutes a "privileged period of reception,"⁶ marked by decisive and definitive doctrinal (interpretative) judgments, and the history of biblical interpretation is rich in insights:

[D]are we claim that we understand and interpret the scriptures better than Origen, Augustine of Hippo, Cyril of Alexandria, Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Teresa of Avila? . . . It would be foolhardy to assert that twentieth-century Christians have clearly progressed beyond all previous generations in their personal study, understanding, and interpretation of the Bible.⁷

Since there is no neutral stance from which to read Scripture—despite the claims of some exegetes—theological readers of Scripture should imitate these great thinkers by not shying away from reading the Bible in faith as well as therefore within the community of faith.

In short, in order to engage the dynamic realities described in Scripture, the reader of Scripture, as indeed with any literary work, must be

tween Two Horizons contextualizes Green and Turner's new series of biblical commentaries, the Two Horizons Commentary Series, which "seeks to reintegrate biblical exegesis with contemporary theology in the service of the church" (2).

4. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 8.

5. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 14.

6. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 14.

7. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 15.

willing to adopt “a responsive, imaginative, and participatory approach.”⁸ Reading Scripture well requires experiencing, knowing, and loving the realities Scripture depicts, just as reading Shakespeare well requires going to the theater and appreciating the poetry and drama. Abstract knowledge or knowledge that refuses to take spiritual realities into account cannot suffice for profound reading of Scripture, because Scripture aims at the encounter with God: “The knowledge of God and ourselves is available only by personal participation and through relationship. The scriptures are in the business of furthering such self-knowledge and knowledge of God.”⁹ Indeed, all knowledge has a personal dimension. While this truth certainly does not invalidate historical-critical methodology, it does rule out any special claim that historical-critical scholarship might have to objective interpretation.

In light of these foundations, Kendall and O’Collins propose ten principles. It will be helpful to quote them here (with the one-sentence description given by the authors) before commenting in more detail:

1. *The Principle of Faithful Hearing.* The scriptures require theologians to be faithful and regular hearers of the inspired texts.
2. *The Principle of Active Hearing.* Responsible theologians are active interpreters of the scriptures, appropriating them within the contexts of prayer, study, and action.
3. *The Principle of the Community and Its Creeds.* The scriptures call for a theological interpretation and appropriation within the living community of faith and in the light of its classic creeds.
4. *The Principle of Biblical Convergence.* Convergent biblical testimony can bear on the theological questions being examined.
5. *The Principle of Exegetical Consensus.* Where available, the consensus of centrist exegetes guides systematic theology.
6. *The Principle of Metathemes and Metanarratives.* Theological appropriation of the Bible takes account of metathemes and metanarratives.
7. *The Principle of Continuity within Discontinuity.* Various discontinuities within continuities affect the theological “taking over” of the Bible.
8. *The Principle of Eschatological Provisionality.* Their eschatological provisionality regulates the theological role of scriptures.
9. *The Principle of Philosophical Assistance.* The passage from the Bible to theology takes place in dialogue with philosophy.
10. *The Principle of Inculturation.* The task of inculturation helps to shape any theological appropriation of the scriptures.¹⁰

8. O’Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 17.

9. O’Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 18.

10. O’Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 6–7.

After the first chapter introducing the ten principles, the chapters of O'Collins and Kendall's book exhibit the value of the principles by concretely applying them to particular themes such as "The Divinity of Christ," "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," "The Petrine Ministry as Easter Witness," and so forth. I find these chapters to be a largely persuasive explication of the theological conclusions made possible by the ten principles. Nonetheless, the model of "theological use of Scripture" set in place by the ten principles has significant limitations.

Consider for example the first two principles, "Faithful Hearing" and "Active Hearing." The first principle holds that "revelation's absolute priority over all human opinions and judgments" means that theologians must "let themselves be addressed and judged by the Bible" and must be "consistently open to revelatory encounters effected by the Bible."¹¹ The second principle adds, "Along with such openness, we expect, however, theologians to be active, responsive, and 'answerable' interpreters of the scriptures, and not merely passive, purely receptive hearers of the Word who woodenly reflect biblical texts in a purely formal way and do not 'give' them anything or 'complete' them in any way."¹² O'Collins and Kendall do not explain how these two principles are not extrinsic to each other. From the account they give, one might think that there are two poles—biblical authority and individual freedom—that have to be weighted evenly in theological practice but have no interior relationship to each other.¹³ Part of the problem lies in beginning with the stance of the theologian, the "hearer." Had they placed "God teaching" at the heart of the principles, they could have made clear how "biblical authority" and "individual freedom" or creativity find their unity in the human fulfillment given by God. Beginning anthropocentrically with the "hearer" makes it difficult to account fully for the hearer's receptive stance.

Similarly, consider the fifth and sixth principles, "Exegetical Consensus" and "Metathemes and Metanarratives," which express O'Collins and Kendall's view of the relationship between the theologian and the exegete. On the one hand, the theologian should, where possible, grant the validity of an existing, broad exegetical consensus, so as not to go astray by means of theological use of an eccentric and easily refutable reading. On the other hand, more than the exegete, the theologian will be sensitive to "metathemes and metanarratives," what O'Collins and Kendall describe as "patterns of divine activity and promise that recur in the Bible, yield an overall picture, evoke varying human responses, and throw light,

11. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 19–21.

12. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 21.

13. For a postnominalist account of human freedom, cf. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P., from the 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

above all, on Jesus' activity and identity."¹⁴ While not ignoring exegetical consensus about particular trees, the theologian will continue to attempt to see the whole forest.

In their discussion O'Collins and Kendall state that theologians will have to "learn to adjudicate between competing interpretations and discern what they buy and continue to buy on the exegetical market," and similarly advocate "shrewdly testing the material taken on board from the distinct, if closely related, field of exegesis as such."¹⁵ But they do not address the question of why the practice of theology can claim such ability to judge and subsume exegetical results. One might put the question this way: Why should exegetes take theologians seriously as ad hoc practitioners of exegetical judgments? Why is the theologian's relationship to the exegete's work not merely ad hoc or extrinsic? O'Collins and Kendall also seem to assume that the current divide between the expertise of the biblical scholar and that of the theologian is permanent. I wonder whether, at least in Christian theological and exegetical training, the two could not be increasingly drawn together.¹⁶

The same concern regarding extrinsicism applies to the third, seventh, and eighth principles, "Community and Its Creeds," "Continuity within Discontinuity," and "Eschatological Provisionality." Regarding "Community and Its Creeds," they state, "Religious truth-claims are essentially related to a religious way of life. The truth-claims of the scriptures cannot be systematically clarified unless they are also related to the Christian community's cumulative tradition of interpreting and 'performing' the scriptures."¹⁷ Since the authors of the books of Scripture make "truth claims" from within the Spirit-filled community's "tradition of interpreting and 'performing' the scriptures," these "truth claims" are more than "essentially related to" the "tradition of interpreting and 'performing' the scriptures": the "truth claims" are already and constitutively part of that tradition.¹⁸ With respect to "Continuity and Discontinuity" and "Eschatological Provisionality," O'Collins and Kendall argue that theological exegesis will expect "discontinuity in continuity" (because of Christ's death and Resurrection) and will recognize the provisionality and limited character of all interpretations (because of the

14. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 28.

15. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 26.

16. Cf. the efforts of Francis Watson: *Text, Church, and World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) and *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). In *Text and Truth* Watson observes with regard to the relationship of exegetes and systematic theologians that "the whole point" of his earlier book "was to challenge precisely this structure of mutually-exclusive, self-contained 'guilds'" (vii; cf. 1-9, 25-28).

17. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 24.

18. Cf. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

promised eschaton).¹⁹ To avoid extrinsicism here, O'Collins and Kendall need to clarify that theologians are not merely suspended between the Resurrection and the eschaton, but rather are working in the eucharistically constituted church.

Lastly, regarding the ninth and tenth principles, "Philosophical Assistance" and "Inculturation," O'Collins and Kendall refer to the biblical texts as "by and large . . . prephilosophical."²⁰ This is perhaps true if by "philosophical" one means a set of complex conceptual tools. Seen from a different angle, however, "philosophical" realities—being, action, nature, causality, participation, and so forth—are found on every page of the Bible and are intrinsic to biblical interpretation; the interpreter has continually to decide one way or another about the character of reality, and such determinations will unavoidably be philosophical precisely by being exegetical. Their concrete examples suggest that O'Collins and Kendall recognize this point, but their formulation of the problem gives a different impression: "Our ninth principle states that theology will remain low on clarity and substance unless it puts the scriptures into dialogue with philosophy."²¹ The Scriptures are already caught up in philosophy, even if not with philosophy understood as a determinate set of conceptual tools.

The tenth principle advocates "[t]ranslating scriptural thought into contemporary languages and cultures (so that every generation can appropriate and 'inhabit' the biblical narrative)."²² The points that they go on to make are generally balanced, but lack an inquiry into what it might mean to "'inhabit' the biblical narrative." It is presumed that by making the biblical narrative less foreign, one makes it more habitable. Yet, what makes the biblical narrative "habitable"? The principle of inculturation tends to devolve into an effort to take a moderate middle ground, balancing competing claims. Thus, O'Collins and Kendall write, "A concern for inculturating trinitarian belief through Hindu philosophy can recommend, for instance, professing faith in 'Being, Consciousness of Being, and Enjoyment of Being.'"²³ The commendation of "Being, Consciousness of Being, and Enjoyment of Being" indicates a failure to grapple adequately with what it means to inhabit Trinitarian worship.

To sum up: The ten principles provided by O'Collins and Kendall are helpful. There can be no quarrel about the desirability of faithful and active hearing, ecclesial and credal interpretation, biblical "convergence" and metathemes, attention to exegetical consensus, awareness of continuity

19. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 30.

20. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 32.

21. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 31.

22. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 33.

23. O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 37. They add, "But when we discuss analogous examples in Chapter 4, we shall argue that a-historical translations of trinitarian belief must not be allowed to take over in an exclusive way" (38).

within discontinuity and “eschatological provisionality,” and philosophical and transcultural appropriation. But in explicating their principles, they often fall into extrinsic counterpoising of one element with another.

III. THE PRINCETON SCRIPTURE PROJECT'S *THE ART OF READING SCRIPTURE*

Does the Princeton Scripture Project avoid this tendency toward extrin-
cism? The Princeton Scripture Project, which “proposes a quiet revolution
in the way the Bible is taught in theological seminaries” and “calls pastors
and teachers in the churches to rethink their practices of using the Bible,”
comprises fifteen scholars and pastors who convened regularly at the
Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey, during the years
1998 to 2002.²⁴ The group agreed upon nine theses or “fundamental affir-
mations,” intended to foster “continued debate and reflection within the
framework defined by our common convictions”²⁵ and to “strengthen a
gathering new consensus about the need for the church to recover its own
heritage of biblical interpretation—and to reclaim its conviction that the
Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible tell the true story of God’s
gracious action to redeem the world.”²⁶

The Scripture Project’s “Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scrip-
ture” are as follows:

1. Scripture truthfully tells the story of God’s action of creating, judg-
ing, and saving the world.
2. Scripture is rightly understood in light of the church’s rule of faith
as a coherent dramatic narrative.
3. Faithful interpretation of Scripture requires an engagement with
the entire narrative: the New Testament cannot be rightly under-
stood apart from the Old, nor can the Old be rightly understood
apart from the New.
4. Texts of Scripture do not have a single meaning limited to the intent
of the original author. In accord with Jewish and Christian tradi-
tions, we affirm that Scripture has multiple complex senses given
by God, the author of the whole drama.

24. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003): xx. The unusually eminent, interdisciplinary, and ecumenical group of participants included Gary A. Anderson, Richard Bauckham, Brian E. Daley, S.J., Ellen F. Davis, Richard B. Hays, James C. Howell, Robert W. Jenson, William Stacy Johnson, L. Gregory Jones, Christine McSpadden, R. W. L. Moberly, David C. Steinmetz, Marianne Meyre Thompson, J. Ross Wagner, and Robin Darling Young.

25. Davis and Hays, eds., *Art of Reading Scripture*, xvii.

26. Davis and Hays, eds., *Art of Reading Scripture*, xx.

5. The four canonical Gospels narrate the truth about Jesus.
6. Faithful interpretation of Scripture invites and presupposes participation in the community brought into being by God's redemptive action—the church.
7. The saints of the church provide guidance in how to interpret and perform Scripture.
8. Christians need to read the Bible in dialogue with diverse others outside the Church.
9. We live in the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God; consequently, Scripture calls the church to ongoing discernment, to continually fresh rereadings of the text in light of the Holy Spirit's ongoing work in the world.²⁷

How do these nine theses compare with O'Collins and Kendall's ten principles? Rather than attempt a comprehensive comparison, I will try to note some key points.

The first point is an obvious one: O'Collins and Kendall, seeking to describe a Catholic biblical interpretation, can assume that the Holy Spirit is active and present in guiding the visible church. The Princeton Scripture Project mentions the Holy Spirit in thesis nine and implies the role of the Holy Spirit elsewhere. It envisions (in the seventh thesis) the “saints” as guiding scriptural interpretation by offering examples of “interpretive virtues” and “faithful performance” in holy living, and recognizes (in the sixth thesis) that “[s]criptural interpretation is properly an ecclesial activity whose goal is to participate in the reality of which the text speaks by bending the knee to worship the God revealed in Jesus Christ.”²⁸ These positions, when combined with the second thesis's affirmation of Scripture's “unity” grounded in God's speaking and elucidated by the “rule of faith” as well as the nod in the third and fourth theses toward the patristic-medieval fourfold sense, draw the Scripture Project close to an affirmation of the visible church's role in exegesis. Even so, the Scripture Project remains somewhat unclear about how the Holy Spirit historically mediates truth in the church, including in scriptural interpretation. At bottom of course is how to account for the historical discontinuities in ecclesial scriptural interpretation. The Princeton Scripture Project does not directly grasp this nettle, but instead focuses upon the perhaps rather tenuous efforts of believers, formed in various communities, to uphold a scriptural “rule of faith.”

Even so, the Scripture Project's affirmations regarding both ecclesial reading and participation in the realities depicted by Scripture indicate a more profound awareness of the unity of the church's *doctrina*, and thus

27. Davis and Hays, eds., *Art of Reading Scripture*, 1–5.

28. Davis and Hays, eds., *Art of Reading Scripture*, 3–4.

of the Holy Spirit's unifying work, than do O'Collins and Kendall's broadly parallel principles of "Faithful Hearing," "Active Hearing," "Community and Its Creeds," "Biblical Convergence," "Metathemes and Metanarratives," and "Continuity within Discontinuity." Catholics, as represented at least by O'Collins and Kendall, are somewhat inclined to reify "biblical interpretation" as something that must then be related both to the church and to "theology," rather than recognizing that scriptural interpretation is a fundamentally ecclesial mode of participating in God's teaching or *sacra doctrina*.

Second, O'Collins and Kendall argue for the necessity of philosophical teaching in the interpretation of Scripture, but this aspect is left out by the Scripture Project. Instead, the Scripture Project emphasizes the texts' historicity and understands the Bible as a "drama" or "coherent dramatic narrative" that requires "imaginative readings" adequate to the reality, God, who is revealed.²⁹ Problems arise here, since the notion of "historicity" is itself a philosophical or metaphysical one and since the human agents in any historical drama will be involved in realities that require metaphysical description. The Scripture Project's emphasis on historical research, paired with imaginative engagement with the "drama" or "narrative," does not address the metaphysical commitments necessary for reading Scripture as divine teaching about reality.

Third, the Scripture Project's approach rightly challenges certain aspects of O'Collins and Kendall's principle of "Exegetical Consensus." O'Collins and Kendall, writing for an audience of theologians, have in view the work of the academic guild of biblical scholarship and wish to encourage theologians to take this work seriously so as not to construct theological accounts rooted in radically faulty interpretations of Scripture. By contrast, the Scripture Project places front and center the reality that exegesis itself is a theological project. The Scripture Project aims at refashioning the teaching of Scripture among Christians and thus seems to have in view primarily an audience of Christian biblical scholars. This does not mean that the Scripture Project rejects the exegesis offered by the academic guild and by non-Christians: it affirms that "historical investigations have ongoing importance in helping us to understand Scripture's literal sense" and that "[t]here is a special need for Christians to read Scripture in respectful conversation with Jews, who also serve the one God and read the same texts that we call the Old Testament within a different hermeneutical framework."³⁰

Fourth, the Scripture Project subsumes many of O'Collins and Kendall's principles within an explicit participatory framework that includes the authority of Scripture as the word of God, the "rule of faith,"

29. Davis and Hays, eds., *Art of Reading Scripture*, 1–3.

30. Davis and Hays, eds., *Art of Reading Scripture*, 3–4.

the multiple senses of Scripture, and ecclesial reading with the communion of saints. From within this framework the Scripture Project makes clear the necessity of “dialogue with diverse others outside the church,” and that “our vision is limited by creaturely finitude and distorted by sin.”³¹ Rather than striving to balance extrinsic priorities, the theses of the Scripture Project describe an exegete formed in the practices of faith, hope, and charity within the church’s sacramental and doctrinal mediation of God’s Word—an exegete who already belongs within the participatory framework that is the Bible’s reality as well.

Fifth, the Scripture Project makes room for both the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture (the patristic-medieval fourfold sense), even if only as “a helpful reminder of Scripture’s multivalence.”³² The fourfold sense has of course been somewhat overemphasized in accounts of patristic-medieval exegesis. It is not the spiritual senses per se, but rather exegetical awareness of participating (by scriptural exegesis or *doctrina*) not merely in concepts but in ongoing realities known ecclesially, that constitutes the heart of patristic-medieval exegesis. Yet, the Scripture Project recognizes that the spiritual senses aid in interpreting the literal sense by further exposing the transformative call of the realities taught in the literal sense of Scripture. In contrast, O’Collins and Kendall briefly commend patristic-medieval exegesis, but solely for its practitioners’ wide-ranging knowledge of Scripture and application of Scripture in their lives, not for their exegetical practice as regards the literal and spiritual sense. Nonetheless, the Scripture Project remains a bit unsure about patristic-medieval practice. Thus the Scripture Project notes “for ongoing discussion” this concern: “How, then, do we learn from modern historical interpretations of Scripture while also drawing on the church’s premodern traditions of biblical interpretation? Should either modern or premodern traditions be privileged in the church’s reading of biblical texts? What criteria ought to be employed to provide some determinacy to the interpretation of particular texts?”³³

It seems to me therefore that the Scripture Project’s nine theses constitute an advance over the ten principles of O’Collins and Kendall. Nonetheless, problems remain. The Scripture Project does not know quite what to make of the visible church’s role vis-à-vis authentic exegesis. Likewise, the spiritual senses continue to seem at least for some participants in the project a threat to exegetical engagement with the text. Perhaps most significantly, in contrast to O’Collins and Kendall, literary claims take the place of metaphysical claims, thereby risking the entrapment of exegetes in a closed system of the texts rather than illuminating how the texts mediate realities.

31. Davis and Hays, eds., *Art of Reading Scripture*, 1–5.

32. Davis and Hays, eds., *Art of Reading Scripture*, 3.

33. Davis and Hays, eds., *Art of Reading Scripture*, 3.

IV. THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND PARTICIPATORY BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Does the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which summarizes and develops the results of *Dei Verbum*, advance the discussion? The *Catechism* divides its presentation of Sacred Scripture into five subheadings: (1) "Christ, the Unique Word of Sacred Scripture," (2) "Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture," (3) "The Holy Spirit, Interpreter of Scripture," (4) "The Canon of Scripture," and (5) "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church." Each of these five subheadings demarcates certain "principles" (not named as such) of theological biblical exegesis.

The first subheading provides the key principle that "[t]hrough all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely" (no. 101). Earlier, discussing divine revelation and its transmission, the *Catechism* had made clear that God reveals himself to Israel and, as the fulfillment of revelation, in Jesus, Israel's promised Messiah, "the Father's one, perfect, and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one" (no. 65). This "one, perfect, and unsurpassable Word" of salvation is passed down and appropriated through the generations in two ways: in the "living transmission" that is the oral transmission (witnessed to in the liturgy, in the writings of the Fathers, and so forth) of apostolic tradition, and in the written words (Scripture) that, inspired by the Holy Spirit, form the New Testament in conjunction with the Old (nos. 74–79).

As this process of passing down and appropriation suggests, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit neither ends nor begins with the recording of the words of the New Testament; on the contrary, the transmission or mediation of God's Word is ecclesial from start to finish (nos. 81–83). The church, as Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic community established sacramentally as participating in Christ, receives and teaches God's Word. She does so not as a mere band of essentially individual believers; rather, as constituted apostolically and sacramentally with a "teaching office" or magisterium, the church faithfully teaches God's *doctrina* in Christ Jesus (no. 84). The church thereby, in obedience, participates in (hears and enacts) the wisdom and love of the living Christ (nos. 85–87).

On this view, doctrinal formulations, as a participation in Christ's *doctrina*, enable exegesis to proceed within the true contours of Christ's *doctrina*.³⁴ Dogma makes of Scripture's *doctrina* not an esoteric knowledge

34. Understanding dogma as the mediation of Christ's *doctrina*, and thus as a participation in his *doctrina* by the Holy Spirit, unites Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic emphasis on practices with others' emphasis on judgments formulated in propositions. Practices and judgments go together.

limited to an educated elite but a wisdom taught in the church to all believers (nos. 88–90). Such salvific wisdom constitutes and sustains the church's life (nos. 91–93). The *Catechism* identifies as inseparable the church's magisterial teaching, the contemplative study of theologians (including exegetes), and the engagement with spiritual realities that the reading of Scripture fosters in believers (nos. 94–95). These three aspects make possible the church's salvific appropriation of Christ the Word, the *doctrina* of the Father in the Holy Spirit.

If the first "principle" of theological exegesis (and theological engagement with biblical exegesis) is that all Scripture reveals in human words the one saving Word of God, the second subheading specifies how the Father, through the Holy Spirit, expresses his Word in human words. Under the rubric of "Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture," the *Catechism* identifies God as the author of the texts of Scripture, which are received canonically by the church because of this divine authorship (no. 105). As the primary and transcendent author, God acts through free human authors to accomplish his scriptural *doctrina*, whose truth flows from God's authority. This truth can be found fully and properly only in faith, since the truth that Scripture proposes is not a matter of mere concepts fitted to human knowing, but rather consists in judgments regarding living realities that surpass human abilities to conceive (nos. 106–108).³⁵

All Scripture teaches God's Word; God teaches his true Word through the mediation of human authors, inspired by the Holy Spirit, whose teachings must be appropriated in faith. A third subheading follows: "The Holy Spirit, Interpreter of Scripture." In light of the Holy Spirit's activity in history, one must seek to understand the human authors' intention in light of their particular historical contexts (no. 110). The truth intended by the human authors will not be found, however, outside of a recognition that, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the human authors were engaging the very realities that believers engage today (no. 111). The *Catechism*, following *Dei Verbum*, specifies three "criteria for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Spirit who inspired it" (no. 111). These three criteria are the unity of Scripture, the church's living tradition as an interpretive key, and the "analogy of faith" that illumines the intelligible pattern of the plan of revelation (nos. 112–114). The Holy Spirit's role as interpreter also justifies, in the *Catechism's* view, continued employment of two "senses" of Scripture, the literal sense and the threefold spiritual sense, which deepens believers' appropriation of the literal sense (nos. 115–118). Finally, the Holy Spirit's role as interpreter ultimately provides the justification for the church's magisterial authority in interpreting Scripture, since the Holy Spirit builds up the unity of the community of believers rather than establishing individualistic patterns of interpretation (no. 119).

35. In contrast to concepts, of course, judgments attain the *esse* of things.

A fourth subheading—"The Canon of Scripture"—flows from the three prior ones. Here the *Catechism* observes that the church determined the canon of Scripture on the basis of apostolic tradition, thereby indicating the interrelationship of these two streams (Scripture and tradition)³⁶ from the one source of divine revelation. The *Catechism* then makes observations about the books of the Old and New Testaments that constitute the "canon." Against Marcion, the Old Testament is the Word of God (no. 123), which expresses the divine pedagogy active Christologically and therefore irrevocably in Israel (nos. 121–122). The New Testament, whose heart is the Gospels, describes Christ and the church in a manner that is historically accurate ("the honest truth") and also is reflective of both the post-Resurrection enlightenment of the apostles and the human modes of the evangelists' writing (nos. 124–127).

Given the canonical unity of the two testaments, typological reading is not only appropriate but necessary in order to expose the profundity of the testaments' relationship to each other as well as to their eschatological fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem, although such reading must not deny that the Old Testament is already revelation and not merely a dispensable prolegomena, to be either discarded or entirely reinterpreted, to the New Testament (nos. 128–130). Thus, the fifth subheading, "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church," depicts Scripture as nourishing the cruciform life of believers through frequent reading and liturgical proclamation. As in typological reading, the exegetical present participates in the past, and both in the eschatological future.

In short, one finds in the five subheadings proposed by the *Catechism* the creative and salvific movement from God and to God, a movement that occurs in the Word and by the Holy Spirit, and that works itself out in the concrete particulars of human history. The goal of God's scriptural *doctrina*, participated in by the church, is the configuration of believers to the image of the crucified and risen Lord. This is a radically "participatory" metaphysical and Christological/pneumatological understanding of exegesis: exegesis, as a human action, is inscribed within the dynamism by which human beings "become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). Genesis is not merely a text; it manifests the exegete's very being as created, fallen, and re-created in the mystical Body of the new Adam. Deuteronomy's providential pattern of blessing and curse is not merely a motif, but the very reality of divine Providence whose center is blessing in the ecclesial Bride's marriage with Christ. And so forth.

36. On this pair, see Robert Louis Wilken, "Interpreting the New Testament," *Pro Ecclesia* 14 (2005): 15–25; Guy Mansini, O.S.B., "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing: Scripture, Tradition, and Church in Luke-Acts," in *Sapere teologico e unità della fede. Studi in onore del Prof. Jared Wicks* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2004).

How does this theocentric participatory framework for understanding Sacred Scripture compare with the theses and principles of the Scripture Project and O'Collins and Kendall? As we have seen, the Scripture Project's nine theses rely upon literary discourse to express the exegetical importance of entering into the biblical framework: "tells the story," "coherent dramatic narrative," "engagement with the entire narrative," "the whole drama," "narrate the truth." O'Collins and Kendall's ten principles, in contrast, assume the framework of revelation and focus upon the needs of the professional theologian responding in a balanced manner to the competing demands of the academy, the church, and the wider pluralist world: "faithful hearing," "active hearing," "community and its creeds," "exegetical consensus," "philosophical assistance," "inculturation." The *Catechism* differs from both approaches by emphasizing at every step the creative and redemptive action of the Word and the Spirit, in which framework Scripture accomplishes the divine Teacher's purpose of inviting the church to share ever more deeply in the action of the Word and the Spirit.

Obviously, no set of principles can address all the needs and audiences of theological exegesis. Despite the defects of the genre, however, efforts to describe constructive principles assist the goal of improving upon traditional historical-critical exegesis. What principles would be required by a "participatory biblical exegesis"? Building upon O'Collins and Kendall, the Princeton Scripture Project, and the *Catechism*, I propose the following seven key words:

1. Theocentric. The Triune God is the source and goal of biblical exegesis. The goal of reading Scripture is union with the living God.
2. Christological/Pneumatological. The missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit make possible a reading of the Old Testament as fulfilled rather than as negated by the New Testament and a reading of the New Testament as present in the Old Testament. In light of the missions of the Son and the Spirit, the spiritual sense of Scripture deepens believers' self-understanding, understanding of the church, and anticipation of the eschaton.
3. Ecclesial. Without repudiating other contexts for reading Scripture, participation in the Israel of God is the context for biblical exegesis that seeks union with the realities that Scripture mediates. The church's theology, catechesis, and evangelization are therefore not extrinsic to biblical exegesis.
4. Participatory- and linear-historical. Time is both a series of moments (linear) and a participation in God (participatory). In God's wisdom and love, the realities of the past are not isolated from present and future realities. Rather, time possesses an interior principle of unity

that undergirds time as a series of moments. Historical-critical exegesis needs to be more fully historical.

5. Sapiential. Scripture's diversity does not prevent its being a unified wisdom. Even though the full appropriation of Scripture's unity is an eschatological reality, this unity is already anticipated in the church's communion.
6. Embodied. The realities learned in biblical exegesis are lived out in our embodiment of supernatural wisdom and love in the world. The lives of the saints are most fully "exegesis."
7. Humble. A posture of charitable receptivity, hearkening to the insights of many voices, characterizes biblical exegesis. The role of the church's teaching office, guided by the Holy Spirit, is to configure interpreters to receptivity rather than self-sufficiency.

IV. CONCLUSION

For "participatory biblical exegesis," the exegetical goal is contemplative union with the Creator God who redeems us and unites us to himself. As Robert Wilken observes in contrasting modern and patristic exegesis: "We are inclined to begin with the book, with historical context and social setting, words and idioms, grammar and literary forms, religious and theological vocabulary, and the many other topics that command our attention. But the early Christians began with the risen Christ."³⁷

What does this mean for the practical task of exegetical training? Among other things, it means that in addition to continued study of biblical languages and the ancient near-Eastern contexts of biblical writings, exegetical training requires an understanding of "history" more adequate to God's creative and redemptive action. Such training will develop a hermeneutics that is not separated from metaphysical and theological wisdom. Exegetical training also requires a receptive ecclesial mission rather than solely an academic one. This mission will be fostered by training in the history of exegesis as well as by appreciation for the teaching office of the church. Finally, since the goal of exegesis is union with God, exegetical training will attend to the lives and writings of the saints, namely those who have manifested the fruits of such union in our communities.

Exegesis thus involves, as Stephen Barton points out, "*becoming apprentices to masters found trustworthy in the discipline of performing the scriptures, an apprenticeship which involves critical immersion in the life of scripture-shaped communities.*"³⁸ The human history in and behind

37. Wilken, "Interpreting the New Testament," 16.

38. Stephen C. Barton, "New Testament Interpretation as Performance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999): 179-208, at 208.

scriptural *doctrina*, as well as the history of exegesis, involves a series of linear temporal moments that historians and theologians do well to seek to understand; and yet these linear moments most properly exhibit human agents' participations in God's creative and redemptive act. It is this living God that biblical exegesis calls us to learn.



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