



The Bible in Roman Catholicism since *Divino Afflante Spiritu*

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I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

For both Roman Catholics and Protestants the rise of historical criticism of the Bible ranks as one of the most significant events in the life of the church since the reformation. In a recent, magisterial survey of the development of New Testament research, William Baird notes:

The critical study of the Bible began in the eighteenth century. At a time when all fields of inquiry were undergoing a revolution, so, too, was the investigation of the NT. The old ways, with their authoritarian presuppositions and orthodox conclusions, were being challenged. The new methods of science, devoted to empirical observation and rational deduction, swelled into a tidal wave, engulfing the whole intellectual landscape.¹

With its long tradition of stressing the authority of the Bible as the sole norm for belief and practice (*norma normans, non normata*), and with the legacy of the emphasis in Luther and Calvin on the literal meaning of the text, Protestantism was much better poised than Catholicism to meet the challenge of the enlightenment.² Protes-

¹William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 1, *From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 3; see also his shorter discussion, "New Testament Criticism," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 1.730-36.

²Baird, *History*, 3-4.

tant theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries presents a history of the attempts to combine faith and scholarship, belief and rational inquiry, in the study of the Bible.³ Also, until quite recently biblical scholarship was principally done by Protestant scholars, who have been responsible for the major achievements of biblical scholarship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Roman Catholics met the challenge of the rise of historical consciousness and historical criticism in ways often radically different from their Protestant counterparts.⁴ Historians often date the rise of Catholic biblical scholarship from the work of the French Oratorian Richard Simon (1638-1712) who published a series of works applying critical methods to the Bible.⁵ Simon's aim was apologetic, to show that the Protestant *sola scriptura*, "when carried to its logical extreme, makes confidence in the Bible impossible."⁶ His fate, however, was to be

expelled from the Oratorians (1682) and to have his writings put on the Index of Forbidden Books.

Historical criticism within Catholicism more properly begins with the attempts to grapple with rising historical consciousness by members of the Catholic Tübingen school in the nineteenth century. Its progress was hampered, however, by a number of significant factors. The polemical atmosphere that had long prevailed in a divided western Christianity made biblical scholarship suspect as a “Protestant” enterprise. The revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century, which ended in the destruction of the papal states, spawned a papacy that was suspicious of modern political and intellectual movements. The First Vatican Council (1869-70) was defensive in its posture toward modernity, and its definition of papal infallibility, in the minds of many people, further undermined the authority of the Bible within Roman Catholicism and widened the gap between Protestants and Catholics.

In 1878, when the long pontificate of Pope Pius IX (1846-78) ended, the prospects were dim for any emerging Catholic biblical scholarship. Little was

³This is the perspective in the fine survey by Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University, 1988) esp. 17-33.

⁴A full history of Roman Catholic biblical scholarship remains to be written. Excellent overviews are Raymond F. Collins, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987) 356-86, and John S. Kselman and Ronald D. Witherup, “Modern New Testament Criticism,” *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* [hereafter, *NJBC*], ed. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989) 1142-45 (on Catholic critical scholarship); R. E. Brown and T. A. Collins, “Church Pronouncements,” *ibid.*, 1166-74. For the United States, see Gerald P. Fogarty, *American Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A History from the Early Republic to Vatican II* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989). I have treated aspects of this development elsewhere; see John R. Donahue, “Scripture: A Roman Catholic Perspective,” *Review and Expositor* 79 (April 1982) 231-244; “Between Jerusalem and Athens: The Changing Shape of Catholic Biblical Scholarship,” in *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Thomas P. Flint (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1993) 285-313; “Things Old and Things New in Biblical Interpretation,” *The Way*, Supplement 72 (1991) 20-31. I am conscious of inevitable overlap in these presentations.

⁵See Jean Steinmann, *Richard Simon et les origines de l'exégèse biblique* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959).

⁶Edgar Krentz calls Simon “the direct founder” of the historical-critical method (*The Historical-Critical Method* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 150).

expected from the new pope, Leo XIII (1810-1903) who was a relatively old 68 when elected. After his election and during a surprising 25-year pontificate, however, Leo pursued a program “of reconciling the Church with modern civilization.”⁷ Perhaps best known for his encyclical letter, “On the Condition of Labor” (*Rerum Novarum*), May 15, 1881, which stands at the fountain-head of a century of Catholic social teaching, Leo is also remembered by biblical scholars for the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (lit., “The God of All Providence”) on the promotion of biblical studies, issued on Nov. 18, 1893.⁸ This letter, while exhibiting a cautious defensiveness against rationalism and while defending the inspiration and inerrancy of the biblical text, directed attention to a study of the “literal” sense of Scripture, and urged that professors be prepared for Catholic seminaries who are versed in the “Oriental languages” and schooled in “the art of criticism.”⁹ The years immediately following this encyclical witnessed the beginning of modern Catholic biblical scholarship at the recently founded École Biblique in

Jerusalem (1890) and at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome (1909).

After the death of Leo XII and during the pontificate of Pius X (1903-1914) these first seedlings of emerging biblical scholarship soon fell on the rocky ground of the anti-modernist reaction, amid attempts of Roman integrist to tar biblical scholars with the brush of modernism. The early decrees issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1905-15) mandated for Catholic scholars the most traditional position on virtually every issue raised by critical scholarship, such as the historicity of Genesis and the priority of Matthew.¹⁰ Anti-modernist reaction was especially destructive of Catholic biblical scholarship in the United States, still in its infancy in the first decades of the twentieth century. In his recent history of American Catholic biblical scholarship, Gerald Fogarty describes its long term effects as follows:

The state of Catholic biblical scholarship in the United States at the end of the 1930's was bleak. Whatever scholarship there had been at the beginning of the century had either been destroyed or gone underground....The type of Neo-Thomism, formulated in the nineteenth century to combat rationalism, had become so pervasive that Catholic writers confused rationalism with doctrine.

⁷"Leo X," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1974) 813.

⁸While Protestant historians often date major shifts in theology and church life according to scholars and theologians (e.g., Schleiermacher, Barth, Bultmann), Catholics tend to center on the teaching of ecumenical councils or papal statements. For Catholics, ecumenical councils are the major source of authoritative church teaching. In the modern period encyclicals, which are letters to the whole church, have been a major vehicle of authoritative papal statements. They are generally named by the two or three Latin terms with which they begin. The best collection of authoritative teaching on biblical scholarship is James J. Megivern, ed., *Bible Interpretation, Official Catholic Teaching* (Wilmington, NC: McGrath, 1978); *Providentissimus Deus* is found on pp. 193-220. Given the tendency of Pope John Paul II to commemorate the work of his predecessors, it is widely reported that a new encyclical on biblical interpretation will be issued on or around Nov. 18, 1993.

⁹See Megivern, ed., *Bible Interpretation*, esp. 208, 211.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 228-252. These decrees were substantially reinterpreted in 1955; see *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 18 (1956) 23-29. For summary and discussion, see, R. E. Brown and T. A. Collins, *NJBC*, 1171-72.

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Jesuit professors like Peirce and Gruenthaner took as their starting point, not the criticism of texts, but the declarations of the popes or the Biblical Commission....In effect, integristism had become a habit of mind, even after Benedict XV had condemned it. The American church gave little indication that it was ready to undertake any type of scholarly endeavor.¹¹

Despite such bleak prospects, the late 1930s and early 1940s witnessed the real birth of Catholic biblical scholarship in the United States. In 1937 the Catholic Biblical Association was formed, growing out of the need to provide a new translation of the Scriptures to supplant the older Douay-Rheims version. More significantly, amid the darkest days of World War II, the dedication and patience of biblical scholars such as Marie-Joseph Lagrange (1855-1938), an eminent exegete and founder of the *École Biblique*, and Augustin Bea (1881-1968), rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute from 1930-49, bore fruit in the encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (lit., "Inspired by the Divine Spirit"), issued by Pius XII on Sept. 30, 1943, to commemorate the

fiftieth anniversary of Leo XIII's encyclical.¹² Here Pius rejects those Catholic conservatives who “pretend that nothing remains to be added by the Catholic exegete of our time to what Christianity has brought to light.”¹³ The letter also approved critical methods, urging that exegetes “endeavor to determine the peculiar character and circumstances of the sacred writer, the age in which he lived, the sources written or oral to which he had recourse and the forms of expression he employed.”¹⁴ Exegesis of the text was to be determined by the literal (or literary sense) defined as “the literal meaning of the words, intended and expressed by the sacred writer,” and while exegetes were also exhorted “to disclose and expound the spiritual significance intended and ordained by God, they should scrupulously refrain from proposing as the genuine meaning of Scripture other figurative senses.”¹⁵ This letter has often been called the Magna Charta of Catholic biblical studies.¹⁶

II. THE AFTERMATH OF *DIVINO AFFLANTE SPIRITU*

Divino Afflante Spiritu contributed to the acceleration of biblical studies in the United States, especially in the 1950s. These years witnessed a changing of the guard as younger scholars were now trained not only at Catholic institutions such as Catholic University and the Pontifical Biblical Institute, but also at secular institutions such as Johns Hopkins, under the direction of William Foxwell Albright.¹⁷ Still, the progress of biblical studies was far from smooth. Biblical scholars

¹¹Fogarty, *American Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 198.

¹²Megivern, ed., *Bible Interpretation*, 316-42. Augustin Bea, who was made a Cardinal in 1959, emerged as a leading advocate of ecumenism before and during the Second Vatican Council and served as the first prefect of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (1960-68).

¹³Megivern, ed., *Bible Interpretation*, 331.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 328-29.

¹⁶Most recently by R. Brown in “Church Pronouncements,” *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1167.

¹⁷Among them were Raymond E. Brown and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, two of the most renowned biblical scholars of the past twenty-five years.

continued to be attacked by conservatives in the United States, encouraged and supported by the heirs of integrism in Rome. For example, Edward F. Siegmann, who, as editor of the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* from 1951-58, transformed that periodical into a solid scholarly journal, was constantly attacked by integrists, leading to his dismissal from Catholic University in 1961 on purported grounds of ill health. At the beginning of the pontificate of Pope John XXIII (1958), important biblical scholars were attacked, culminating in the removal of Stanislas Lyonnet and Maximilian Zerwick from their teaching positions at the Pontifical Biblical Institute on the eve of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁸ When John XXIII shocked the world on Jan. 25, 1959 by announcing that he intended to call an Ecumenical Council, the theological atmosphere did not bode well for the future of biblical studies. Yet it was to be the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (“The Word of God”), in the context of the general renewal of church life and theology accomplished by Vatican II, that spawned a full flowering of Catholic biblical studies.

The emergence of the decree on revelation at Vatican II from a reactionary preliminary

draft, prepared by conservative Roman theologians and presented at the first session of the Council, to a nuanced statement on revelation and biblical exegesis, finally passed on Nov. 18, 1965, is a drama in itself.

On important issues of biblical interpretation *Dei Verbum* remains dialectical, reflecting its origin as a document combining traditional perspectives with cautious openings to more progressive thought. The text states that the magisterium, the teaching office of the church, is not above the word of God, but serves it; yet it also asserts that “the task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office (Magisterium) of the church” (art. 10). Thus the teaching office is simultaneously the servant of the word and its authentic interpreter; the whole church determines the development of tradition, but is subordinate to the teaching authority.¹⁹

Chapter three of this decree, “The Divine Inspiration and Interpretation of Sacred Scripture,” was of most interest to biblical scholars. After describing inerrancy in article 11 (in one of the most debated sentences of the council) as extending to “that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation,” the decree turns to biblical interpretation in article 12. The principal norm of interpretation is that “the interpreter of sacred Scripture in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writer really intended and what God wanted to manifest by

¹⁸For a chronicle of these attacks, see J. A. Fitzmyer, “A Recent Roman Scriptural Controversy,” *Theological Studies* 22 (1961) 426-44; also, R. E. Brown, “Church Pronouncements,” *NJBC*, 1168.

¹⁹This tension of perspectives was perceived during the conciliar debates by Cardinal Emile Léger of Montreal who felt that the council did not submit tradition strongly enough to the authority of the word, and noted shortly after the council by Abbot Christopher Butler, who wrote, “It is all very well for us to say and believe that the magisterium is subject to holy Scripture. But is there anybody who is in a position to tell the magisterium: Look you are not practicing your subjection to Scripture in your teaching,” in J. J. Miller, ed., *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1966) 89.

means of their words” (art. 12). Selective methodological principles are then given to attain the original sense of the text: (1) attention must be paid to the literary forms; (2) the interpreter must consider the historical circumstances of the time of writing; and (3) attention must be paid to “the customary and characteristic patterns which people in that period employed in dealing with each other.” In principle no method of scholarly inquiry is precluded in seeking the meaning of texts. These directives, in effect, repeat the major points of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, but by being incorporated in a solemn decree of an Ecumenical Council, they receive an enduring authority in the church.

Equally important at Vatican II was the exhortation that Catholic lay people read the Bible, and that new translations be prepared. The Bible was also to assume a leading role in every liturgical celebration, and the council spoke of the faithful being fed at the table of both the word of God and the body of Christ (art. 21). Though in post-reformation polemics the Bible had often become the symbol of Protestantism and the chalice that of Catholicism, now word and sacrament were seen to have unified and equal power.

The immediate history of post-Vatican II Catholic biblical scholarship, in concert with other theological disciplines, presents a dazzling kaleidoscope. One immediate effect was the commitment to biblical and theological studies by a great number of people. More and more

talented lay people, especially women scholars, entered the field. Roman Catholic scholars quickly became leaders in the scientific study of the Bible. The biblical renewal became the soul of bilateral ecumenical dialogues, as groups turned to the scriptural roots of disputed issues only to find that a historical critical reading of the Scriptures challenged positions once thought to be set in concrete.²⁰ Theologians such as Küng, Schillebeeckx, and Kasper all wrote significant studies of Jesus, solidly informed by biblical scholarship.²¹ Redaction criticism helped to recognize the theological creativity and literary achievement of the evangelists and disclosed a multi-colored pluralism in the NT itself. Fresh translations were prepared, in co-operation with non-Catholic scholars, such as the *Bible of Jerusalem* (1966, revised in 1986 as *The New Jerusalem Bible*) and the *New American Bible* (1970; revised New Testament, 1986) and Catholics participated in the production of commentaries no longer divided along confessional lines. Biblical scholarship became quickly the most ecumenical of all the theological disciplines, so much so that now divisions arise often not across confessional lines, but across methodological lines (e.g., Catholic and Protestant narrative critics aligned against more traditional historical critics in both groups). Creative theological movements such as feminist and liberation theology wrestled critically with the biblical texts as a source of their insights. Catholic church life was significantly

²⁰See esp. R. E. Brown, "The Contribution of Historical Biblical Criticism to Ecumenical Church Discussion," in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and the Church*, ed. Richard J. Neuhaus (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) 24-49.

²¹Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury, 1980); *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Walter Kasper, *Jesus The Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1976).

changed as the Bible assumed a greater role in liturgy and preaching and literally thousands of religious and lay people flocked to summer institutes and workshops sustained by joyful discovery of the manner in which the Bible touched their lives.

III. PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

Yet certain problems and challenges emerged, some of which are the legacy of the past, while others are brought on by questions never envisioned by *Divino Afflante Spiritu* or the decree on revelation. At the risk of a certain superficiality, I will highlight a few of these.

The first touches on the official acceptance and widespread use of the historical critical method. Despite official acceptance of this method, its conclusions and its leading practitioners, such as Raymond Brown and Joseph Fitzmyer, have been subjected to constant attacks from "neo-integrist" writers, who label historical criticism as modernist or too concerned with the human elements in the Bible.²²

Generally speaking, historical criticism is "the disciplined interrogation of sources to secure a maximal amount of verified information."²³ In studies of the biblical text, its primary aim is to discover the "literal" (or better "literary") sense, defined by Raymond Brown, as "the sense which the human author directly intended and which the written words conveyed."²⁴ To achieve this, historical criticism uses a wide variety of methods: for example, textual criticism, source criticism, studies of the background and influence on a given writer, examination of

literary genres and literary styles of a given document, study of related literature of antiquity. Ideally, the historical critical method *as method* should not be dependent upon the theological commitments or philosophical perspectives of its practitioners, who may reflect widely different religious attitudes and world views. Objectivity is a *sine qua non* when attempting to hear the voice of an ancient writer or to see the pattern of life in an ancient culture.

Most Roman Catholic scholars who employ historical criticism reject historical positivism, anti-dogmatism, and rationalism.²⁵ Biblical scholars are partners in a theological enterprise where exegesis is but one stage in assessing both the meaning and significance of biblical texts. Joseph Fitzmyer, for example, has written that “modern Catholic interpreters” of the Bible employ the philological tools and techniques of the historical critical method with a theological perspective, “a plus or presupposition” that the Bible is “the Word of God couched in ancient human language.”²⁶ This “plus” consists of elements of faith: that the book being critically interpreted contains God’s word set forth in human words of long ago;

²²J. A. Fitzmyer, “Historical Criticism: Its Role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 244. For an example of an ungrounded and unscholarly attack, see George A. Kelly, *The New Biblical Theorists: Raymond Brown and Beyond* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1983).

²³Edgar Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method*, 6.

²⁴“Hermeneutics,” *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1148.

²⁵For a summary of the importance and achievements of historical criticism, see Fitzmyer, “Historical Criticism,” 244-59.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 254.

that it has been composed under the guidance of the Spirit and has authority for the people of the Jewish-Christian heritage; that it is part of a collection of sacred, authoritative writings; that it has been given by God to his people for their edification and salvation; and that it is properly expounded only in relation to the tradition that has grown out of it within the communal faith-life of that people.²⁷ In Fitzmyer’s view, historical criticism exists in the service of and in dialogue with belief and church life.

Secondly, criticism of the historical critical method is prevalent not only among conservative Catholics. Scholars who adopt methods of literary criticism current in the larger arena of humanistic studies argue that historical criticism is too preoccupied with the “world behind the text,” that is, the historical referent, to the exclusion of the “world of the text,” that is, the internal literary structure and meaning which emerges from a study of the text itself. In articles stretching over the last 15 years and in a recently published monograph, Sandra Schneiders has argued that historical criticism does not provide an adequate hermeneutical foundation for a religious appropriation of the text.²⁸ There is a growing consensus among Catholics that neither *Divino Afflante Spiritu* nor the decree on revelation provided the last word on the exegesis of a biblical text; nor did they provide adequate guidelines for the use of the Bible in theology and church life.

Thirdly, the methods and achievement of historical criticism must also be communicated anew to each generation. As Raymond Brown has stated recently, college students today come with minimal knowledge of the Bible and their teachers feel a tension between exposing them to the latest scholarly trends and instructing them “in elementary ways that would enable them intelligently to appreciate the Scriptures they hear on Sunday and to read the Bible for their own

spiritual development.”²⁹ Despite Vatican II’s call for biblical studies to be the soul of theology and an essential part of ministerial preparation, a high number of Catholic M.Div. programs offer inadequate preparation in Scripture.³⁰ Even minimal knowledge in the biblical languages, which is still demanded by many Protestant denominations, has virtually disappeared from Catholic ministry programs. The next generation of pastoral ministers in Catholicism may be no better prepared in biblical studies than were their counterparts prior to the Second Vatican Council.

²⁷Ibid., 254-55.

²⁸Sandra M. Schneiders, “Faith, Hermeneutics, and the Literal Sense of Scripture,” *Theological Studies* 39 (1978) 719-36; “From Exegesis to Hermeneutics: The Problem of the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture,” *Horizons* 89 (1981) 23-39; “The Footwashing (Jn 13:1-20): An Experiment in Hermeneutics,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981) 76-92; “The Paschal Imagination: Objectivity and Subjectivity in New Testament Interpretation,” *Theological Studies* 43 (1982) 52-68. Schneiders’ positions are synthesized in an important recent work, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

²⁹Brown, “Contribution of Historical Biblical Criticism,” 42.

³⁰For statistics see Katarina Schuth, *Reason for Hope: The Futures of Roman Catholic Theologians* (Wilmington, DL: Michael Glazier, 1989) 176-78.

The fourth challenge is the evolution of biblical studies into what Edward Farley has called “specialty fields.” Farley contrasts a specialty field to a discipline. A discipline is “a pedagogical area that exists in a teaching and learning situation in which the teaching and learning are facilitated by the pursuit of scientific, scholarly inquiry.”³¹ In contrast, a specialty field is “an area of cognitive undertaking which has assumed certain features of professionalization and which is focused on a sufficiently restricted set of problems to be able to generate published research in a short time.”³² Four historical conditions combine to make a specialty field: (1) the professionalization of the scholar-teacher, (2) the reward system of the modern university, (3) the paradigm of narrowed empiricism, and (4) the ascendancy of the isolated specialty. One of the by-products of the emergence of specialty fields is the rise of “surfeited specialties,” where scholars search for a province within the specialty field to make their own, so that “to carve out a special niche, aspiring scholar specialists must settle for scrutiny of narrower and narrower sets of problems.”³³

In suggesting that biblical studies is in danger of becoming such a collection of specialty fields, I am not pleading for a return to the elegant generalist. What is needed is an honest “critical pluralism.” A major characteristic of the specialty fields is that its members virtually become a sect, with its own language and often its own prophet. Members of this field draw on each other’s research, which is pronounced valid in virtue of its agreement with the group’s perspectives. Since the specialty field is, or at least appears, highly technical, book reviews are written often by others toiling in the same little plot of land. Reviews become a means of furthering the specialty rather than submitting it to the test of public intelligibility by members of the larger discipline. The ability to enter into respectful disagreement and a mutual quest for truth may be as important to future scholarship as the contemporary proliferation of methods and flood of publications—often at the expense of engagement with the Bible itself.

The fifth (and related) challenge is the need for vibrant biblical theologies and for exegetes to be in dialogue with other theological disciplines. For example, since the beginning of

the biblical renewal there has been no comprehensive New Testament theology by a Roman Catholic, English-speaking biblical scholar. Similarly there has been minimal work in New Testament ethics by English-speaking Catholic biblical scholars.³⁴ The task of New Testament theology is admittedly more complex than it was a quarter-century ago, due principally to the develop-

³¹Edward Farley, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 34.

³²Ibid., 42.

³³Ibid., 39-40.

³⁴In German there is Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, vol. 1, *Von Jesus zur Urkirche* (Freiburg-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 1986); vol. 2, *Die urchristlichen Verkündiger* (1988). As the only major study of New Testament ethics by a Roman Catholic, an English translation is a strong *desideratum*.

ment of newer methods such as literary criticism and sociological exegesis.³⁵ Nonetheless, since biblical theology has always been a child of the marriage of the reigning exegetical methods to the theological questions of a given period, there is no reason why the shifting paradigms and emerging methods of our period cannot be the parent of new biblical theologies.

A sixth challenge is the need to develop pastoral models for biblical studies. Over the years, through publications, lectures, and summer workshops, Catholic biblical scholars have been outstanding in their sensitivity to the pastoral needs of the church. Yet, these commitments have often existed in tension with the more scientific study of the Bible and have been dismissed in some quarters as “popularization.” But other voices are also heard. One example is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who has called for a “Pastoral Theological Paradigm” of biblical studies, one that “holds the pastoral situation and the theological response to it, the historical and theological aspects, the past and present in creative tension,” and that understands the Bible “not as a conglomeration of doctrinal propositions or proofs, not as historical-factual transcripts, but as a model of Christian faith and life.”³⁶ In her 1987 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, Schüssler Fiorenza turned to the specific problem of right-wing political fundamentalism and biblicist literalism; she urged biblical scholars not simply to ignore these developments as an unwelcome aberration, and called on members of the SBL to make their research available to a wider public—“to all those who are engaged in the communication of biblical knowledge, who have to confront biblical fundamentalism in their professions, and especially to those who have internalized their oppression through a literalist reading of the Bible.”³⁷

As Catholic biblical scholarship officially enters its second century, it can look back with a certain satisfaction on major achievements; it must also look forward with courage and wisdom to the unfinished agenda of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and the Second Vatican Council and to the radical new challenges a new century and a new millennium may hold in store.

³⁵For more detail on this, see J. R. Donahue, “The Changing Shape of New Testament Theology,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 314-335.

³⁶Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984) 22-42, esp. 32-36.

³⁷“The Ethics of Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107/1 (March, 1988) 16.

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