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Summer June, 2018

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In its Decree on Priestly Training, Optatam Totius, the Second Vatican Council urged that the “scientific exposition” of moral theology be “nourished more on the teaching of the Bible” (no. 16). In the decree’s context, this desire emerges from within the broader concern for the study of Scripture serving as “the soul of all theology” (no. 16). Has this been accomplished? Or is there room for improvement? We might pose a further question: What is the relevance of Optatam Totius, no. 16, outside of the seminary context? After all, most Catholic moral theologians teaching in the U.S., as with most Catholic theologians teaching in the U.S., are no longer clergy nor teaching in a seminary. In the U.S., professional Catholic theologians (moral or otherwise) increasingly come from among the laity.

Yet, the conviction that Catholic moral theology—and all of Catholic theology for that matter—should be nourished by Scripture transcends the boundaries of seminary education. In fact, it is a notion that predates the Second Vatican Council. Most of the time St. Thomas Aquinas spent teaching was on Scripture, and his biblical commentaries were among his most important works. For St. Thomas, to be a theologian was to be a commentator on the sacred page.1 This was not unique to St. Thomas. In his Breviloquium, St. Bonaventure used “theology” as another term for “Scripture,” and he intended his Breviloquium to be a guide for advancing “through the forest of Sacred Scripture, hacking with an ax and thus laying it open.”2

In his apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis exhorts that all Catholics should study Scripture: “The study of the sacred Scriptures must be a door opened to every believer” (no. 175). We might call this a universal call to Scripture study. In part, this necessity lies in the central place of Scripture in the spiritual life appropriate for all of the faithful, as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI explained in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation Verbum Domini,

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no. 86. Both comments are grounded in the prior teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the universal call to holiness. This call is expressed particularly well in the dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, where we read, “All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (no. 40). These comments from Vatican II, Pope Benedict, and Pope Francis apply to Catholic moral theologians as much as to any other of the Church’s faithful.

With the above in mind, in this essay I discuss some recent work within biblical studies that would be helpful as recommended reading for moral theologians. I have organized the essay around three major parts. I begin with one of my areas of expertise: the history of biblical scholarship. Many of us theologians (moral or otherwise) were trained with particular assumptions regarding the Bible. One of those assumptions, something we tend to take for granted, are certain assured results of modern historical biblical criticism, e.g. “facts,” such as that Mark was the first Gospel written; that the Pentateuch was composed by multiple communities or authors who wrote hundreds of years after the events took place, much of it after the Babylonian exile; that the authors of the Gospels were probably not those traditionally attributed as authors. We may have been taught arguments for each of these assured results of criticism, but we probably were not exposed to contemporary scholarly arguments of contrary positions. Instead, theologians find themselves doing their particular work with such assumptions firmly in place; investigating this status quo is not a priority. Supposedly we all agree on these conclusions, out of respect for the “critical” and “scientific” methods that came to the conclusions.

What we encounter even more rarely in our training is the history

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of the discipline of modern biblical criticism. This history is complex but illuminating. I have found studying the history of modern historical biblical criticism, for example, to relativize and problematize some of its assured results. These conclusions and the arguments behind them were positions adopted for particular historical reasons and not simply because of superior argumentation or explanatory power. Thus, I begin this essay with a look at some recent and important volumes covering this history. Those familiar with William Cavanaugh’s well-known 1995 article “A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House”: The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State” might notice that these texts serve a similar function for understanding the history of modern biblical criticism to that which Cavanaugh’s text did for understanding the modern state and the wars of religion.5

The essay’s second portion includes some guides for Scripture because, like the title of Maimonides’s classic medieval text, we need guides for the perplexed amidst the cacophony of voices within modern (and post-modern) biblical studies. The essay highlights exemplars that provide illuminating guideposts for reading the Bible theologically, as it was intended to be read, and as encouraged by the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*.6

Catholic biblical scholarship has done a superb job in following the first part of the directives in *Dei Verbum* no. 12 (e.g., carefully investigating “what meaning the sacred writer really intended”), but has perhaps not attended as well to reading the Bible in light of its “content and unity,” the Church’s “living tradition,” and “the harmony…between elements of the faith,” or the analogy of faith. The subheading of Benedict XVI’s *Verbum Domini* no. 34, “The Council’s biblical hermeneutic: a directive to be appropriated,” indicates the continued need to engage with the second part of *Dei Verbum* no. 12. The texts I have chosen take seriously the whole of *Dei Verbum* no. 12.

Finally, since this is, after all, an essay for moral theologians, I have selected, in my final section, a number of texts that directly pertain to questions of moral theology and, as such, may be of interest

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Studies in Scripture for Moral Theologians

This essay is intended to introduce moral theologians to a new trend in biblical criticism and the bearing of this trend on moral theology.

My selection may appear idiosyncratic. A moral theologian or a biblical scholar would likely choose to highlight other works. My training was at the University of Dayton in its Catholic theology doctoral program whose focus is the “U.S. Catholic experience.” As such, graduates of the University of Dayton tend to be historical theologians—as my dissertation director William Portier would say, “Can there really be any other kind?” Moreover, I am a convert to the Catholic faith, having been raised agnostic and Jewish, and later entering the Catholic world by the path of evangelical Protestantism. So, my selection is clearly influenced by my own autobiographical details, including this historical perspective and a convert’s perspective that the Church and the Bible make sense and have a claim on my life.

PART ONE: THE HISTORY OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

Too often, standard telling of the history of modern biblical scholarship begins in the nineteenth century with Julius Wellhausen’s particular articulation of the Documentary Hypothesis for the origin of the Pentateuch or with Heinrich Holtzmann’s attempt at resolving the Synoptic problem. Sometimes we hear about precursors to these scholarly hypotheses. Certainly, the literature on the history of modern biblical scholarship is more nuanced, but it is probably rare for such nuance to play a major part of our academic training in theology. When it comes to the historical critical method within the Catholic world, we usually hear little about discussions prior to Venerable Pope Pius XII’s 1943 papal encyclical, Divino Afflante Spiritu, perhaps with the exception of something along this summary: prior to Pius XII the Catholic Magisterium was opposed to historical biblical exegesis but after Divino Afflante Spiritu the Church officially embraced modern scholarly methods.

With this oversimplified historical account in hand, the biblical methods taught in the classroom become starting points. By and large, theologians are not taught to question the various scholarly hypotheses concerning textual composition, chronology, etc., but assume the frameworks and memorize letters, such as J, E, D, and P, and, of course, Q. We see the employment of different names, e.g., God (Elohim) and Lord (Yahweh), or Mount Sinai and Horeb, as

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indications of different authors or literary theo-political communities.\(^8\) We assume and we teach that the so-called Priestly accounts within the Pentateuch were concerned with matters particularly appropriate to priests, such as cleanliness laws and the Sabbath, and we do not bat an eye following the scholarly convention of attributing the description of the seven pairs of clean animals and single pair of unclean animals within the Noah story as originating not with a priestly account (that designation is reserved for the description of ark-building) but rather to the so-called Yahwistic account.\(^9\)

We follow scholarly convention locating the origin of Deuteronomy in the politics of the divided monarchy. Deuteronomy represents the theo-political interests of the south and specifically of the reforms of King Josiah (or more recent scholarship that places Deuteronomy even later in or after the exile), but we do not raise a brow at the lack of any reference to Jerusalem in Deuteronomy (or in the entire Pentateuch for that matter) nor to the fact that the central sanctuary is listed, not in the south, but as Mount Ebal (e.g., Deuteronomy 27) in the North. We do not ask why a pro-southern text would support a northern sanctuary. Nor do we ask why the (northern) Samaritan Pentateuch would include more of the Pentateuch than just supposedly (northern) Elohistic texts.\(^10\) Or, if Leviticus (both the Priestly Code [P] and the Holiness Code [H]) originate after the Babylonian exile, how can it be that Ezekiel is apparently aware of the subtleties in the texts of Leviticus and uses these subtleties to make a contrast with Deuteronomy?\(^11\) If Deuteronomy is so late—first millennium—then why does it fit the second millennium (when it allegedly takes place) so much better?\(^12\) If the Book of Joshua is so late—mid-first millennium—then why does the format of its conquest


\(^9\) For an alternative account of the Noah story, which takes into consideration the literary form of the text as we have it, e.g., its use of chiasmus, see especially Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1-11* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

\(^10\) On the problems the Samaritan Pentateuch poses for Wellhausen-style Pentateuchal source criticism see the dated but still relevant points made in J. Iverach Munro, *The Samaritan Pentateuch and Modern Criticism* (London: Nisbet, 1911).


description fit so well the Egyptian New Kingdom period military scribal techniques, e.g., the Annals of Thutmose III, from the second millennium when Joshua allegedly takes place.\textsuperscript{13}

When we approach the New Testament, we assume the Gospel of Mark was the earliest of the Gospels. We perhaps know some of the arguments in favor of Markan priority, and probably know that a majority (if not all) of our peers in biblical studies adhere to the same. A moral theologian friend once remarked, “Isn’t it odd that the compilers of the canon placed Matthew’s Gospel first when Mark’s was the first Gospel written?” Apparently, this theologian, like so many of us, were not aware that the universal testimony within Christian history for 1800 years was that Matthew’s Gospel was the first, and that this only changed in the latter half of the nineteenth century when the first arguments began to be put forward that Mark’s was the first Gospel. These arguments only gained traction in the wake of the First Vatican Council and were then used by German scholars during Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* as another means of denigrating Catholicism.\textsuperscript{14} Protestant scholar David Dungan confesses that the two-source hypothesis assuming Markan priority “became the accepted hypothesis in the main German universities during the 1870s *Kulturkampf*, where it became another club with which German Protestant scholars could beat the Roman Catholic Church.”\textsuperscript{15} Too often, such history is unknown to theologians.

In addition to the above, most scholars do not realize that Augustin Bea, who drafted *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, also wrote a defense of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch—from which he never backed down.\textsuperscript{16} Or that the same Bea published what many would take to be his “conservative” understanding of biblical inerrancy and also served as the President of the mixed commission responsible for the final form of *Dei Verbum*, the interpretation of which he published after the council, wherein his


\textsuperscript{15} David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 8.

views on inspiration were clearly the same as before.\(^{17}\)

Moreover, we often neglect the importance of the modernist crisis for understanding the history that led to the Second Vatican Council, as well as its resonances with our own teachers and our teachers’ teachers. The central debate about the relationship between faith and reason that emerged in the modernist controversy, and corresponding tensions between these Catholic scholars and the Magisterium, were similar to the debates and tensions of the late 1960s and 1970s, which shaped many of our own teachers.

William Portier summarized the significance of this history thus, “In the chronicle of Catholicism’s protracted and ambivalent struggle with liberal secular states, the modernist crisis emerges as one in a continuing series of Catholic openings to the age. But it is the pivotal opening that gives shape to twentieth-century Catholic theology.”\(^{18}\) I think Portier’s assessment is correct, not only for Catholic theology, but for Catholic biblical scholarship as well. Although this time period is much neglected, it is remarkably important for understanding the history that led up to the Second Vatican Council, as well as the debates which ensued in the Council’s wake. Thus, much of my recent research has dealt with the biblical scholarship of the Catholic modernist controversy, and particularly the work of Alfred Loisy.\(^{19}\) His work, and the reaction against him, became an important unrecognized turning point in Catholic appropriation of these methods and of their assured results.\(^{20}\)

Over the past several decades, scholars, including myself, have begun looking at the history of modern biblical scholarship at an


increasing rate. In this context, Hans Frei’s 1974 *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* is a classic, but for all of its many strengths, it is now dated and really focuses on the nineteenth century. Cavanaugh argued that the modern centralized state did not emerge after the sixteenth and seventeenth century “wars of religion” as a response to those conflicts, but rather those conflicts were its final birth pangs after a long development going back at least as far as the eleventh century. Something similar can be said about modern biblical criticism. Modern biblical criticism did not emerge fully formed in the minds of a few late nineteenth century savants, as a scientific response to and means of liberation from the last remaining theological shackles still then present at universities. Rather, the attempts at severing ties of theology (and religious tests of orthodoxy) from the university in the exegetical and historical work of nineteenth century biblical critics was the final stage in a process that had begun centuries earlier, at least as early as the fourteenth century.

A number of important developments within the history of biblical scholarship have emerged since Frei’s classic text. The scholarship in this area is too extensive to report on fully in this essay. Hence, I highlight only a selection in what follows, with the purpose of indicating that the field is very much alive and dynamic, much more so than an introductory graduate course or textbook in Bible would indicate. Henning Graf Reventlow’s 1980 *Bibelautorität und Geist der Moderne: Die Bedeutung des Bibelverständnisses für die geistesgeschichtliche und politische Entwicklung in England von der Reformation bis zur Aufklärung* exposed important roots of the biblical criticism that would emerge triumphantly in German universities tracing back to earlier English Deism. Beginning in the


1990s, a number of other important contributions to this field were published.\textsuperscript{26} J.C. O’Neill published \textit{The Bible’s Authority: A Portrait Gallery of Thinkers from Lessing to Bultmann} in 1991.\textsuperscript{27} Also in the 1990s William Baird began publishing his important three volume work, \textit{History of New Testament Research}.\textsuperscript{28}

The twenty-first century was greeted by Thomas Howard’s important \textit{Religion and the Rise of Historicism}.\textsuperscript{29} As the twenty-first century got underway, important works in the history of modern biblical scholarship continued to be published. These included Henning Graf Reventlow’s final volume in his four volume \textit{Epochen der Bibelauslegung}.\textsuperscript{30} An even more ambitious project was Magne Sæbø’s massive edited five volume work, \textit{Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation}, which spans antiquity to the present.\textsuperscript{31}

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A number of other important works have come out in more recent years. In 2005, Jonathan Sheehan published his *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*. Sheehan’s volume shows the important cultural shifts that were taking place in the eighteenth century, transforming the Bible, or how it was viewed and used, into something new. No longer primarily a theological wellspring, an encounter with God, or, in the patristic sense, “seeking the face of God” in the present, rather it becomes a cultural document, a foundational text in Western civilization. The extensive scholarly debate on the history of biblical interpretation indicates that interpretation has never been something “neutral.” The conclusions presented to us as facts resulting from the investigations may not all be wrong, but they also merit investigation.

Two recent books on the history of modern biblical scholarship would be of particular benefit to moral theologians seeking to understand this history. The first is Scott W. Hahn and Benjamin Wiker’s *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture 1300-1700*. Hahn and Wiker’s volume considers the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries and represents a unique and important contribution to this history with their basic thesis that “the development of the historical-critical method in biblical studies is only fully intelligible as part of the more comprehensive project of secularization that occurred in the West over the last seven hundred years, and that the politicizing of the Bible was,
in one way or another, essential to this project.”  

Hahn and Wiker clarify the ways in which biblical exegesis served specific politics, and how the different political machinations and diverse philosophical presuppositions functioned together to solidify the groundwork for what would emerge in the eighteenth century as biblical exegetical methods recognizable as modern, historical, and critical. This background is helpful for theologians as it provides the context for the “facts” commonly presented in regard to biblical interpretation; usually there was political motivation to undermine the Church’s authority.

The second is Michael C. Legaspi’s *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*. This work is beneficial to consider after Hahn and Wiker’s volume because it takes the story forward into the eighteenth century. Legaspi begins his volume by discussing two “Bibles,” the “scriptural Bible”—as proclaimed in the liturgy—and the “academic Bible”—as studied by scholars. His overall argument is that, “The history of modern biblical criticism shows that the fundamental antitheses were not intellectual or theological, but rather social, moral, and political. Academic critics did not dispense with the authority of a Bible resonant with religion; they redeployed it.”

Legaspi underscores the way in which modern biblical studies were created at the university through the Bible’s transformation into a political and cultural tool serving the needs of the state. He does this through a careful examination of the leading eighteenth century biblical scholar, Johann David Michaelis, who effected this transformation at the University of Göttingen. Legaspi shows how Michaelis created modern biblical studies by pushing the Bible into the distant past, making the Bible strange to present readers. In this way, political and related aspects of Hebrew antiquity could be reclaimed for the German present, much as had the riches of Greek and Roman antiquity within classical studies. The Bible could thus be redeployed for Michaelis’s present German culture and society, which ensured its place at Enlightenment universities.

In 1988, then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger delivered a lecture that has now become justly famous, “Biblical Interpretation in Conflict.” In it, Ratzinger pointed to the artificial and deceptive way that modern historical biblical criticism often presents itself as objectively and

38 Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, vii-viii.
39 Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, xii.
40 In what follows, I quote from an English translation of a more complete version of the text than the one he delivered in New York City, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *God’s Word: Scripture—Tradition—Office* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 91-126.
formally neutral on par with the hard sciences.\textsuperscript{41} He noted how the methods attempt to push the text of Scripture back into the past, rendering it a dead letter. Ratzinger astutely observes, “In opposition to the history depicted, another ‘real’ history must be constructed; behind the surviving sources—the books of the Bible—more original sources must be found, which then become the criteria for interpretation.”\textsuperscript{42} Elsewhere he calls this “a new variety of allegorism.”\textsuperscript{43}

In light of this “conflict,” as he identifies it, Ratzinger urges, “What is needed is a criticism of criticism…. a self-criticism of historical exegesis…. Self-criticism of the historical method would have to begin with reading its own results diachronically and with moving away from the appearance of quasi-scientific certainty with which its interpretations have hitherto largely been declared.”\textsuperscript{44} Biblical scholars have often been unaware of the philosophical and other presuppositions in their work. As one example, Ratzinger points to the case of Bultmann’s use of Heidegger.\textsuperscript{45} Hahn and Wiker’s volume particularly is an important partial response to Ratzinger’s call for a “criticism of criticism.” What studying this history does is problematize the certitude of so many of the historical starting points which we assume to be true when we approach Scripture as theologians. It frees the Bible from its captivity to secular reason. I have argued elsewhere that this history also accounts for one of the reasons for the “divorce” of Scripture from moral theology.\textsuperscript{46} When Scripture does enter, it too often assumes the form of assured results of historical criticism, and we are left with multiple fragments from long-dead warring theo-political communities where biblical portions are pitted against other portions, depending upon what supports the preferred position. We need Scripture and moral theology to come back together again, recognizing and understanding the conflicts of this divorce is a good first step to reconciling the two and avoiding future conflict.

\textsuperscript{41} Ratzinger, \textit{God’s Word}, 100-102.
\textsuperscript{42} Ratzinger, \textit{God’s Word}, 92.
\textsuperscript{44} Ratzinger, \textit{God’s Word}, 100.
PART TWO: GUIDES TO THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

When we approach Scripture, we often get lost in the shrubbery. Even among biblical scholars, rare indeed is the scholar of the entire Bible. Overspecialization has reached new depths with Scripture study. A biblical scholar might be a specialist in a text, or a few, but there is simply too much scholarly terrain to cover in the study of the entire Bible. The difficulty for anyone is the likelihood of losing the forest for the trees, and this is all the more likely because we have been taught that there is no forest. We have heard it said that Scripture is not unified, but rather represents a heterogeneous collection of documents that were never meant to go together. As long as we begin with that assumption, we will never allow Scripture to have a real claim on our theology, let alone on our lives. And yet, I am convinced of the truth of what Ratzinger claimed in his spiritual Christology:

From a purely scientific point of view, the legitimacy of an interpretation depends on its power to explain things…. its explanatory power is also its ability to maintain the inner unity of the corpus in question. It involves the ability to unify, to achieve a synthesis, which is the reverse of superficial harmonization. Indeed, only faith’s hermeneutic is sufficient to measure up to these criteria…. It is the only hermeneutics which is in a position to hold fast the entire testimony of the sources; it is also the only one which is able to comprehend the sources’ different nuances and their pluriformity, because it alone has a vision of unity which is wide enough to accommodate the apparent contradictions; nothing needs to be excluded on the grounds of its being a hostile development which cannot be integrated into the whole.47

In light of this, there are a few works of two authors I want to recommend and explore as “guides” to the study of Scripture as Scripture: Scott Hahn and Pope Benedict XVI. I focus on Hahn’s work for the Old Testament and New Testament, and Pope Benedict for the New Testament, particularly the Gospels.

Hahn’s work makes him uniquely situated to offer a canonical theological interpretation of the Bible without losing sight of its diverse historical contexts, relying upon these contexts for further theological insights.48 He has synthesized and united a variety of theological topics often separated in the contemporary theological

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48 Hahn’s work was the focus of my doctoral dissertation. See Jeffrey Lawrence Morrow, “Evangelical Catholics and Catholic Biblical Scholarship: An Examination of Scott Hahn’s Canonical, Liturgical, and Covenantal Biblical Exegesis,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Dayton, 2007).
academy: the study of the Old and New Testaments;\textsuperscript{49} the study of Scripture and the study of the Liturgy;\textsuperscript{50} exegesis and dogmatic theology;\textsuperscript{51} the study of both the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture;\textsuperscript{52} modern as well as patristic/medieval biblical interpretation;\textsuperscript{53} as well as bridging the gap between the academic/scholarly and the popular (in both senses, for the non-specialists as well as in high demand).\textsuperscript{54} Moreover, when it comes to his scholarship, Hahn has published major exegetical studies on a vast array of topics: Genesis;\textsuperscript{55} 1 and 2 Chronicles;\textsuperscript{56} Ezekiel;\textsuperscript{57} the Gospel


\textsuperscript{57} Hahn and Bergsma, “What Laws Were ‘Not Good?’” 201-218.
of Luke and Acts;\textsuperscript{58} the Gospel of John;\textsuperscript{59} Romans;\textsuperscript{60} Galatians;\textsuperscript{61} and Hebrews.\textsuperscript{62}

Jon Levenson’s review of Hahn’s Yale University Press volume \textit{Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises}\textsuperscript{63} represents why the book might be helpful to theologians. Levenson complains that, “Hahn harmonizes the Old and the New Testaments.”\textsuperscript{64} Levenson compares Hahn’s reading of the Old Testament to that of Christian writers like the Apostle Paul, denigrating this approach of viewing the Old and New Testaments as a coherent unified story, as Christian writers have done throughout the history of Christianity. Exceptions to such a unified reading were found among the Marcionites (2nd century) who severed ties with the Old Testament, and now much of modern biblical scholarship has attempted the same. The basic Augustinian dictum—“The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New” (\textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, no. 129)—remains an essential starting point of Christian theology. Those who thrive on identifying cacophony in the Bible will obviously be dissatisfied with Hahn’s book describing how Scripture makes sense as one unified

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  \item \textsuperscript{60} Scott W. Hahn, \textit{Romans} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017); and Scott W. Hahn, “‘All Israel Will Be Saved’: The Restoration of the Twelve Tribes in Romans 9-11,” \textit{Letter & Spirit} 10 (2015): 65-108.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} This volume was published as part of the Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library and was the first volume in that series published by Yale University Press after they took over the Anchor Bible series from Doubleday. \textit{Kinship By Covenant} represents a rewritten version of his doctoral dissertation, Scott Walker Hahn, “Kinship By Covenant: A Biblical Theological Study of Covenant Types and Texts in the Old and New Testaments” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1995).
  \item \textsuperscript{64} See Jon D. Levenson review of \textit{Kinship By Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises}, by Scott W. Hahn, \textit{Journal of Religion} 90, no. 2 (2010): 241. In context, Levenson asserts that, “whereas [Brevard] Childs insisted on hearing the ‘discrete witness’ of each testament, Hahn harmonizes the Old and the New Testaments by subordinating the former to the latter in a single, Christian economy of salvation.”
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narrative about the history of salvation, as the “fulfillment of God’s saving promises,” as his subtitle states. That unified vision, however, is beneficial for theologians looking to make sense of the seemingly conflictual elements of the Bible, particularly those who have been presented with much conflict but not with the possibility of a unified story.

Hahn focuses on the notion of covenant in Scripture because covenant constitutes a sacred means of extending family relations. This is precisely what Christianity envisions God doing with us—taking mere creatures and extending divine family relations. In other words, God takes us and makes us family. Covenant was an ancient Semitic means of extending such relations and thus God’s covenants in Scripture are one more example of the divine condescension. God stooped down to our level in order to elevate us to God’s level (deification/theosis). Covenants were “legal means to integrate foreign individuals or groups within the familial structure of society.”

Hahn walks through a number of major covenants of the Old Testament—with Noah, Abraham, Moses (in Exodus and Deuteronomy) and David—and then moves seamlessly to the New. He begins with an examination of how Luke and Acts depict Jesus fulfilling the Davidic covenant. He shows how Luke presents Jesus as the new Davidic king, and the emphasis on the kingdom “encovenanted” (bequeathed) to the Apostles in the context of the Last Supper (Luke 22). Likewise, Acts follows the Chronicler’s account of presenting the Davidic kingdom as the kingdom of Yahweh, and thus the Church as the fulfilled and transformed Davidic kingdom. It is not only national or even international—David’s kingdom, especially under Solomon, included gentiles—but universal and cosmic. Essential to this vision is the sacramental nature of Jesus’ kingdom. By baptism, the Spirit is poured out, and the Eucharist remains the center of the kingdom. Hahn continues with Galatians and Hebrews, underscoring how Jesus is depicted there as fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant forged at the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22).

Kinship By Covenant does a superb job of showing a coherent bird’s eye view of Scripture as a whole by homing in on key passages from the Old and New Testaments that tie the rest together. The notion of covenant is not an external construct forced onto Scripture but rather represents the familial relationship humanity is called to have

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65 Hahn, Kinship By Covenant, 3. Writing further on the same page he explains, “The covenant bears all these aspects [legal/ethical, cultic, juridical] because it is an extension of familial relationships, and the extended family…was the central framework for the legal, religious, and political activities of ancient Semitic society.”
66 Hahn, Kinship By Covenant, 217-237.
67 Hahn, Kinship By Covenant, 237.
with God. The power of Hahn’s reading is not only in its ability to hold Old Testament and New Testament together in a robust canonical reading, but in that it does so in a unifying way that takes the narratives seriously as well as the doctrinal tradition of the Church.

Hahn’s theological commentary on 1 and 2 Chronicles, The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire, shows how 1 and 2 Chronicles interpreted the prior Old Testament story in light of its provisional fulfilment in the Davidic kingdom, which it understands in light of humanity’s priestly vocation, and in light of its expected fulfilment in the Messiah, whom we Christians believe to be Jesus. Hahn explains, “More than a summary or overview, Chronicles is a theological and liturgical interpretation of Israel’s history that answers key questions: Who are we? How did we get here? What must we do, and why?” Hahn shows how Chronicles becomes a key to understanding the point of the rest of the Old Testament—a key the New Testament authors rely upon—by helping its hearers and readers remember their vocation, and that vocation had a liturgical shape. Hahn emphasizes that “Cult and history are inseparable in Israel’s covenant relationship with God. For Israel, liturgy was historical and history was liturgical.” This becomes the perspective from which Chronicles retells the history of Israel found already in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. Thus, the focus on the Davidic covenant sets the stage for the new covenant to come in the New Testament. Hahn’s reading indicates that Chronicles has unified the Old Testament, in light of the people’s priestly vocation and the liturgical shape of the kingdom—straining toward the promised fulfilled in what would come in the New Testament.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote quite a lot about Scripture, among many other theological topics (moral theology, eschatology, sacraments, liturgy, historical theology, etc.). In his comments which he made after presenting his Erasmus Lecture, Ratzinger argued for the need to integrate traditional and modern methods of exegesis, utilizing the best of both methods. His Jesus of Nazareth trilogy shows us the type of exegesis he has been calling for.

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69 Hahn, Kingdom of God, 2.
70 Hahn, Kingdom of God, 9.
As with Hahn’s work, Benedict’s *Jesus of Nazareth* volumes evidence a profound liturgical reading of Scripture. One key place where he does this is in his first volume when he writes:

The main issue in the foreground of the struggle for liberation prior to Israel’s exodus from Egypt is the right to freedom of worship, the people’s right to their own liturgy. As time went by, it became increasingly clear that the promise of the land meant this: The land was given as a space for obedience, a realm of openness to God, that was to be freed from the abominations of idolatry…. From this perspective, the exile, withdrawal of the land, could also be understood: The land had itself become a zone of idolatry and disobedience, and the possession of the land had therefore become a contradiction. A new and positive understanding of the diaspora could also arise from this way of thinking: Israel was scattered across the world so that it might everywhere create space for God and thus fulfill the purpose of creation…. The Sabbath is the goal of creation, and it shows what creation is for. The world exists, in other words, because God wanted to create a zone of response to his love, a zone of obedience and freedom.

Volume One is more wide-ranging than the successor volumes. In some ways, the first volume provides the main theological framework for the whole trilogy. His foreword to that initial volume provides his brief overview of contemporary methods, with his critique of some trends in modern biblical criticism, and his comments about what Catholic exegesis should look like. His statements about Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels and how he will engage with those portraits are telling.

I wanted to try to portray the Jesus of the Gospels as real, “the historical” Jesus in the strict sense of the word. I am convinced, and I hope the reader will be, too, that this figure is much more logical and, historically speaking, much more intelligible than the reconstructions we have been presented with in the last few decades. I believe that this Jesus—the Jesus of the Gospels—is a historically plausible and convincing figure.

In short, Benedict’s *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy brings the Jesus of...
the Gospels to life in a way that is compelling and sensitive to recent findings of modern biblical criticism, while following the guidelines Benedict has proposed for Catholic interpretation. His exegesis, particularly in the first volume, brings together typology, matters of doctrine, as well as issues in moral theology. Like Hahn, Benedict is helpful because his approach is canonical, assumes Catholic doctrine as guideposts, takes the texts’ historical context seriously, as well as the insights of the church fathers and medieval theologians.

PART THREE: SCRIPTURE AND MORAL THEOLOGY

There are several relatively recent works in biblical studies that relate more directly to moral theology and the work moral theologians do. The first in this list is Matthew Levering’s *Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach*. This volume addresses moral theological issues within the framework of natural law traditions, but Levering grounds his discussion of natural law within the biblical tradition as opposed to more philosophical and abstract ways of dealing with natural law arguments.

The biblical jubilee tradition has many implications for moral theology, and John Sietze Bergsma’s *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, based on his University of Notre Dame doctoral dissertation, is the most thorough treatment of the jubilee tradition within the Old Testament texts (Pentateuch, Prophets, historical books, etc.).

Rodrigo J. Morales, now Isaac Augustine Morales, O.P., published an insightful article dealing with the liturgical context of the ethical discussions in 1 Corinthians. The article is entitled, “A Liturgical Conversion of the Imagination: Worship and Ethics in 1 Corinthians,” and looks at St. Paul’s use of Jewish and Old Testament Passover imagery as the context for understanding the Christian Eucharistic liturgy, which then undergirds his ethical concerns in his epistle.

C. Kavin Rowe’s *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age*, is a wonderfully fresh account of the book of Acts with far-reaching implications for how we as Christians should live, particularly in regard to the various modern states in which we find ourselves as pilgrims. Likewise, his *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* does a marvelous job of

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reading both classical and New Testament sources from within a MacIntyrean framework.\(^{81}\)

Gary A. Anderson’s *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* is an immensely challenging book. This volume is clearly of direct interest for moral theology, but should be of concern to anyone who takes the name Christian.\(^{82}\) Likewise his *Sin: A History* has important implications for how we understand the notion of sin, and justification, in the history of biblical and early Jewish and Christian development.\(^{83}\) Finally, Nathan Eubank’s *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew’s Gospel*,\(^{84}\) which relies on Anderson’s work, has important implications for understanding the role of bearing one’s cross in the economy of salvation, and in Christian life.

**CONCLUSION**

The Bible can appear daunting for any believer, including theologians. The length and complexity of the texts can be overwhelming, and it is easier simply to dismiss or ignore certain passages that complicate or challenge our presumptions. Moreover, theologians may feel inadequately prepared to engage Scripture in our work. While this is understandable, the benefit of Scripture is irreplaceable for theologians, both from a spiritual and an academic perspective. In our theological work, then, the challenge is to incorporate the Bible without reducing it to one among many sources, on par with the latest sociological study or Pew research report. One thing we learn from the history of biblical interpretation is that the Bible has often been used for political ends. When involving Scripture in our scholarship, then, we should guard against doing the same, namely redeploying the Bible for our own purposes. Making an effort to form ourselves in the Bible through daily reading and also approaching the text with humility, assuming a harmonious, unified whole, can assist us in guarding against this temptation of use. The Bible is not a source to use as proof-texting nor is it the embarrassing evidence of an uncouth relative to be hidden, ignored, or dismissed. Scripture, rather, should be seen as a gift to be embraced rather than avoided; theology has everything to gain by a more serious engagement with the Bible. Likewise, moral theologians have every-


thing to gain from a more serious engagement with the Bible.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{85} I owe Maria Morrow thanks for critiquing a draft of this essay. I also owe thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their comments which aided the final revisions of this piece.