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Equilibrium in Biblical Exegesis: Why Evangelicals Need the Catholic Church

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express deep love and affection for Carol Joy, my mother, who first taught me to walk, and then to read.

I am thankful for Rubin and his many furry friends, who taught me to walk and read at the same time, thus financing my education.

I am indebted to my entire family for their love and support, especially Lynne, Jacob, David, Benjamin, Samuel, and my father, Bill.

I am humbled by the entire theology department at Loyola University Chicago. I am aware that I did not deserve this opportunity, but I am grateful for their tremendous guidance and patience. I especially am beholden to my dissertation committee, Dr. Martin, Fr. Bernardi, and Dr. Radde-Gallwitz.
For a man speaks more or less wisely to the extent that he has become more or less proficient in the Holy Scriptures.

—Augustine, *De Doctrina*, Book IV

*On essaie sans cesse d’inventer un idéal meilleur et plus beau, une vérité plus large. A mesure que l’humanité grandit, le Christ se lève.*

(People always try to invent a better and more beautiful ideal, a larger truth. But as humanity grows, Christ rises above the horizon.)

—Maurice Blondel, “Letter to Victor Delbos, May 6, 1889”
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<td>CCC</td>
<td><em>Catechism of the Catholic Church</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>English Standard Version (2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DV</td>
<td><em>Dei verbum</em> (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td><em>Gaudium et Spes</em> (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world)</td>
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<td>LG</td>
<td><em>Lumen gentium</em> (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)</td>
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<td><em>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</em> series 1</td>
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<td>ThQ</td>
<td><em>Theologische Quartalschrift</em></td>
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<td>UR</td>
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INTRODUCTION

Evangelical\(^1\) biblical exegesis suffers from a loss of equilibrium. A hallmark of evangelical Christianity is faith in the supreme authority of Scripture, often conveyed in the phrase *sola scriptura*. However, this conviction has not prevented a multiplicity of interpretations of the Bible, some of which flatly contradict others, and some outlying interpretations which clearly part from traditional Christian dogma. In addition, polemics over the best interpretation of Scripture has often resulted in deep divisions, even formal fragmentation of Christian unity. This dissertation argues that the lack of equipoise across evangelical exegesis is due largely to its underdeveloped hermeneutical framework.\(^2\) Specifically, it lacks clear ecclesial support.

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\(^1\) The term “evangelical” is used variously. Carl Braaten gave one of the simplest and most direct definitions of the term when he described it as being “defined by the evangel, the good news of the gospel.” Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 55. In this work, the term will refer to “a large family of churches and enterprises” within Protestantism that exhibit a “consistent pattern of convictions and attitudes.” Cf. Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 13–14. These markers include an emphasis on personal religious conversion, a reliance on Scripture as ultimate religious authority, an active concern for sharing the Christian faith with others, and a theological focus on Christ’s work on the cross. Evangelicals regularly worship in various denominations or independent groups. The evangelical indicators just listed apply to a wide variety of Christians, including revivalists with hardly any ecclesiology, and Reformed theologians, both modern ones and those found at such places as Princeton and Mercersburg Seminaries in the nineteenth century. It is understood that some of these groups might prefer other terms than “evangelical” to describe themselves. In addition, while recognizing that many forms of evangelicalism exists around the globe, this dissertation will focus on American evangelicalism.

\(^2\) In this work, “hermeneutics” refers to the theories, methods, and principles of biblical interpretation, while “exegesis” refers to the act of interpretation. In a more colloquial description, hermeneutics refers to the rules of the game, and exegesis refers to the actual game played on the field.
Evangelical exegesis of Scripture occurs within an assortment of hermeneutical models; however, a recurring theme is present in most of them. Although evangelicals disagree among themselves regarding the role of ecclesiology in hermeneutics, most give the Catholic Church little deference when it comes to biblical interpretation. To this reader, this exclusion is flawed and touches the nerve of the problem. Historically, it has contributed to the diminution of nearly any Christian ecclesiology, the secularization of Sacred Scripture, and multiple unorthodox interpretations of Scripture.\(^3\) Ironically, knee-jerk antagonism by evangelicals toward anything Catholic unveils premises which contradict the very Bible evangelicals attempt to interpret.

Several evangelicals have recently identified the need for biblical exegesis to return to its ecclesial *Sitz im Leben*. While suffering friendly fire from fellow evangelicals, some have even dared to dialogue with the modern Catholic Church. To this author, some of these attempts might be heading in a positive direction, but few go far enough. Catholic and evangelical dialogue partners often talk over each other, and do not engage the other deeply. In addition, other attempts at retrieving the ecclesial *Sitz im Leben* of biblical exegesis simply exhibit inadequate goals. Most of these efforts only want to get back to the early days of the Reformation or retrieve influential reformed theologians;\(^4\) few attempt to openly face the living Catholic Church.

\(^3\) Carl Braaten lists two polarized “heresies” which thrive when the “church-relatedness of Scripture” is neglected: fundamentalism and historicism. Braaten and Jensen, *The Catholicity of the Reformation*, 61.

This dissertation is written from an evangelical standpoint, and it is directed to an evangelical audience. It is specifically focused on how to read Holy Scripture. The author was professionally trained and later practiced what is often termed the “historical-grammatical” method of biblical interpretation. This work initially set out to critique the general lack of ecclesiology within that particular hermeneutical method. However, it quickly became apparent that a high number of other evangelical hermeneutical models, whether liberal or conservative, similarly suffered from a lack of ecclesiology. In addition, those evangelical models which thankfully sought to incorporate some ecclesiology back into biblical interpretation were forged in inadequate molds. Some limited their focus to Protestant or Reformed ecclesial renewal, and held little regard for pre-Reformation Catholic ecclesiology. Others submitted the Catholic Church to a Hegelian view of history, and limited its validity to a past moment. Still others simply advocated a post-liberal democratic model of ecclesiology, which frequently disdained hierarchy and nearly any traditional authoritative structure. Many positive aspects were discovered in most evangelical hermeneutical models, but nearly all of them remained reticent towards engaging the Catholic Church on Catholic terms. This dissertation was written to address that deficiency.

Very few evangelical hermeneutic models seriously engage Catholic thought or retrieve the vast quantity of available Catholic documents. The following work hopes to remedy that negligence. This work attempts to take Jesuit Jared Wick’s instruction seriously: “Theology is first an attentive listening to the testimonies of the word of God
received in faith, especially the faith of the corporate body of the church.”\textsuperscript{5} This attempt to understand the relation between Church and Bible from inside a Catholic perspective is by no means the only approach to biblical exegesis; however, it is an approach which is rarely attempted by evangelicals, despite the fact that it is essential. The contention of this work is that evangelicals need to develop a more robust ecclesiology, including a direct engagement with the modern Catholic Church, if they hope to read Scripture well and see the prayer of their Lord fulfilled.\textsuperscript{6}

To make its point, this dissertation will investigate the contrasting effects of evangelical and Catholic ecclesiologies on biblical interpretation as each group contended with modernity. Despite clear distinctions between the challenges faced by evangelicals and Catholics, an analysis of the contrasting results is possible, legitimate, and helpful. The Catholic Church engaged changing realities on political, social, philosophical, and economic fronts which evangelicals never faced. In addition, Catholic intellectual centers were based in Europe, not in America.\textsuperscript{7} Nonetheless, both evangelicals and Catholics engaged modern thought in relation to biblical interpretation at intersecting moments. Both still needed to address the increasing rationalism in Scripture studies. Both groups

\textsuperscript{5} Jared Wicks, \textit{Doing Theology} (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 31.

\textsuperscript{6} John 17:20–22 (ESV).

\textsuperscript{7} Catholic identity in early America was still largely influenced by European thought. Early American Protestantism, unlike American Catholicism, had already developed much of its own identity in the new nation. Protestants comprised the majority of the American population, and although influenced by European thought, their theological expressions were distinct. Catholics did not comprise a significant part of the American population until the large Irish immigration of the nineteenth century. With the exception of Baltimore, few sections of America even had a significant Catholic presence. A large percentage of Catholic bishops, such as Baltimore’s John Carroll and Louisville’s Benedict Joseph Flaget, were born and educated in Europe. Cf. Thomas W. SpaULDING, \textit{The Premier See: A History of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1789-1994.} (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989).
were concerned that some modern paradigms jeopardized the credibility of external revelation, and risked changing what were considered immutable dogmatic truths. Further, both sought to maintain Christian unity among their people during internal polemics on the pressing issues. Near the center of it all was the question of how to read the Bible. In addition, particular evangelicals and Catholics have attempted to dialogue over the last few decades. Among evangelicals, a renewed interest in the relation between Church and Scripture has manifested. This dissertation is relevant because a historical basis is vital for any evangelical who hopes to participate in the conversation.

The first four chapters of this dissertation will primarily be historical, and the final two chapters will chiefly be constructive. This work will begin with an analysis of the axiomatic relationship between Church and Scripture prior to the Reformation, and then highlight the development of Biblicism following the Reformation (chapter one). It will then turn its focus to American evangelicalism, primarily in the nineteenth century, and consider the various ways evangelical groups addressed the challenges of biblical modernity (chapter two). From there, it will analyze responses to biblical modernity

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9 The term Biblicism is used differently by various modern authors. In this dissertation, the term signifies confidence that a particular structured Church is not needed to read the Scriptures in their fullness. Such a view holds that neither ecclesial authority nor Tradition is necessary for a clear reading of the Bible. This dissertation will not wade far into the debates over literal and metaphorical interpretation of select passages, or arguments focused on degrees of inerrancy.

10 This dissertation will occasionally use the term “biblical modernity” or a similar expression. The phrase is admittedly broad. Here, “modernity” or “modern era” suggests the historic era beginning around the time of the Reformation. However, “biblical modernity” refers to a secular approach to biblical studies which specifically developed after the Reformation. It assumes that Church authority, Tradition, spiritual
from the Catholic Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as their own attempts at renewal (chapters three and four). After the historical analyses of the first four chapters, this dissertation will issue a call for evangelicals to reassess their dominant hermeneutical models. This will include a brief survey of literature, and a critique of recent evangelical efforts at biblical interpretation. It will also argue for particular contours needed for a robust reassessment of biblical hermeneutics (chapter five). The dissertation will conclude with an attempt to construct theological reasons why critical empathy for the Catholic Church is essential for evangelical exegesis, as well as practical next steps (chapter six).

One of the vulnerabilities of this dissertation is its attempt to analyze biblical interpretation over long periods of time. The danger with this approach is it risks merely surveying trends while neglecting important distinctions between individuals. Despite the inherent danger with creating a panoramic view, this author considered it unavoidable at times due to significant misconceptions evangelicals exhibit regarding Christian history and Catholic theology. Specifically, three dangerous blind spots need attention prior to suggesting direction for evangelical hermeneutics. First, evangelicals cannot risk being ignorant of the commonly assumed relationship between Church and Scripture prior to the Reformation. Second, evangelicals need to be aware of the development of Biblicism which has influenced their own hermeneutical models. Third, evangelicals ought to become conversant with Catholic teachings which actually confirm certain evangelical illumination, faith, and even the inspiration of the text are unnecessary to biblical exegesis; indeed, they may hinder superior exegetical work.
convictions. Due to the need to bring attention to these blind spots, surveys will be a necessary part of this work.
CHAPTER ONE
THE STABILIZING ROLE OF ECCLESIOLOGY IN BIBLICAL EXEGESIS, AND
ITS STEADY DEMISE

Introduction

Evangelicals who wish to reassess the foundations of their own hermeneutics need to revisit historic Christian assumptions related to biblical exegesis. Specifically, the axiomatic relationship between Church and Scripture prior to the Reformation needs to be reconsidered. In addition, the development of Biblicism after the Reformation, and its effect on biblical modernity should be traced. These examinations will occur in this chapter, and can help the evangelical to determine where present day hermeneutic models need adjustment. It is critical for this chapter to give significant attention to these concerns. Many contemporary evangelicals, regardless if they are more conservative or liberal, are simply unaware of the historic rapport between Church, Tradition, and biblical interpretation. In addition, some evangelicals still seem unwilling to consider that certain remedies for their current complaints might be found in the ecclesiology that was left behind.
The Axiomatic Relationship between Church and Sacred Text

The Church’s Book

The concept of *sola scriptura*, as popularized by present day Biblicists,¹ would have been foreign to early Christians. This is because Scripture was the book of the Church, and it was produced in her womb. The Church predated the New Testament, and the earliest epistles² were written by people within the Church to already existing churches.

Prior to the Reformation, Christian exegetes kept the “universal” conviction that Scripture contained divine revelation and was therefore the ground of theology.³ On one hand, Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit; it was the authoritative written word of God. Referencing Paul’s statements in Ephesians, Bonaventure said that “theology” is the “end of Holy Scripture.” One could not think about theology without thinking of the

¹ Evangelicals understand *sola scriptura* with nuanced differences. The general consensus is that the Scripture remains the final arbiter or supreme authority in all Christian theological discussion; no ecclesial or private determination can undermine Scripture. This dissertation does not challenge that point. Instead, it challenges the Biblicist’s idea of *sola scriptura* which suggests the Bible can be read well in isolation, particularly in a non-ecclesial setting. This work argues that Church, and therefore Tradition, are necessary guides to reading Scripture. Cf. Daniel H. Williams, *Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation: A Sourcebook of the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 28; and Timothy George, “Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology,” in *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do They Share a Common Future?* ed. Thomas P. Rausch (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 140.

² Currently, 1 Thessalonians is often considered the earliest New Testament text.

³ Henri De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 1, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 24–25. De Lubac writes, “It was an almost unanimously held proposition, right up to the eve of the Reformation, that Scripture contains all of revelation in the sense, at least, that we shall be dealing with.” At this point, De Lubac quotes Anselm as saying that Scripture constitutes the “grounds for theology.” He further cites Anselm: “There is nothing that we preach with profit for the salvation of souls that Sacred Scripture, fertilized as it is by the miraculous action of the Holy Spirit, has not made known or does not contain within itself.” For further detail, cf. de Lubac’s first two endnotes for this section on p. 289.
biblical text. The Scriptures were “breathed out by God,” could not be “broken,” and were considered “perfect.” Those who neglected or abused written revelation did so to their own peril. On the other hand, most exegetes prior to the Reformation demonstrated the assumption that the sacred text needed to be interpreted in the sacred Church. The same Spirit which had inspired Scripture had also organized the Church and helped form its traditions. Specifically, biblical interpreters often looked to the Church’s bishops, in succession with the apostles, to provide authoritative explication of the sacred text. The Church’s leadership safeguarded the Scriptures, which were intended to be read within the traditions of the Church. Despite their distinctions in exegetical method and disagreements over interpretation, exegetes appear to have generally worked under these assumptions; the organic relationship between the living apostolic Church and the text of Scripture was not dramatically disputed among orthodox theologians. For Ignatius of

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5 2 Timothy 3:16.

6 John 10:35.

7 Psalm 19:7.

8 Cf. 2 Peter 3:16; Revelation 22:18–19.

9 The intent here is not to romanticize pre-modern scriptural interpretation. The episcopal system was not hermetically sealed. Polemics over exegesis often resulted in formal divisions in the Church, and left unresolved. Bishops did not always solve problems, and even caused some of them. Instead, the goal here is to demonstrate a prevalent assumption in pre-Reformation Christianity that is largely absent in contemporary evangelical thinking: the Scriptures are best interpreted in the Church, and safeguarded by its ordained leadership.

10 Although this dissertation is focused on orthodox, not heterodox, reception of the Scriptures, it should be noted that several Gnostics critiqued the Church’s orthodox explication of Scriptures. Gnostics had their own special form of apostolic tradition, which usually contained a secret key for interpreting both the Old and New Testaments, and which had been given orally. The sacred mysteries were passed down from Christ after his resurrection, through certain apostles, to those who were initiated into the Gnostic mysteries. The mysteries were conveyed by living voice, not written documents. Therefore, only those secretly initiated in the mysteries could ever read the Scriptures accurately. According to Clement of
Antioch, the living deacons were to be respected as “the law of God,” and “no one” was to do “anything” “in the church” “without the Bishop’s approval.” For Athanasius, the “tradition, teaching, and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning” had been given by the Lord,” preached by the “Apostles,” and preserved by the “Fathers.” Certainly, the inspired Scriptures were “self-sufficient” to proclaim the truth, but God had given “blessed teachers” to help elucidate the meaning of the holy text. “The one who reads” the “teachers” will “gain some knowledge of the interpretation of the Scriptures.” “For it is right and meet thus to feel, and to maintain a good conscience toward the Fathers, if we be not spurious children, but have received the traditions from them, and the lessons of religion at their hands” Ecclesial office mattered to Augustine when it came to biblical exegesis. He claimed that the authority of the Catholic Church was “inaugurated by miracles, nourished by hope, enlarged by love, established by age.” In regards to his own perseverance, it was the “succession of priests,” “beginning from the very seat of the


13 Athanasius of Alexandria, Contra Gentes, in Against the Heathen, NPNF-2, 4:4.

14 Athanasius of Alexandria, epistula de synodis Ariminii et Seleuciae, 47 in Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia, NPNF-2, 4:475.
Apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, after his resurrection, gave it in charge to feed his sheep, down to the present episcopate,” which kept him.\textsuperscript{15} He asserted that, “For my part, I should not believe the gospel except for the authority of the Catholic Church.”\textsuperscript{16} Augustine considered it a monstrosity for one to confidently claim to “obey the precepts of the gospel” on one hand while decrying the “Catholic Church” on the other hand.\textsuperscript{17} Basil of Caesarea affirmed the deity of the Spirit based on “ideas” “held in common;” those ideas came from the “Scriptures,” as well as the “unwritten Tradition of the Fathers.”\textsuperscript{18} Basil complained that his opponents “clamor for written proof and reject the unwritten testimony of the Fathers as worthless.”\textsuperscript{19} In response, Basil asked, “Shall we cast away the standard of teaching we received?”\textsuperscript{20} Basil’s Trinitarian theology was confirmed by both the text of Scripture and the unwritten Tradition in the life of the apostolic Church. While commenting on Paul’s admonition to “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter,” \textsuperscript{21} John Chrysostom said, “Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by Epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Augustine, \textit{Contra Epistolam Manichaei quam vocant Fundamenti}, 4, in \textit{Against the Epistle of Manichaeus Called Fundamental}, NPNF-1, 4:130.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Augustine, \textit{Against Manichaeus}, 5, NPNF-1, 4:130–131.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Augustine, \textit{Contra Faustum Manichaeum}, 5:11 in \textit{Reply to Faustus the Manichaean}, NPNF-1, 4:167.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Basil, \textit{On the Holy Spirit}, 10:25, 46.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Basil, \textit{On the Holy Spirit}, 10:26, 46.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} 2 Thessalonians 2:15.
\end{itemize}
credit. Therefore let us think the Tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a Tradition, seek no farther.”22

**Ecclesial Christology**

The prevalent Christocentric interpretation of Scripture in the first centuries of Christianity provides evidence that the apostolic Church was assumed to be the necessary interpreter of holy Writ. Ancient Christian literature recurrently put Jesus Christ forward as the central focus of Scripture and its interpretive key. Although a Christocentric reading of Scripture is a postulation of faith on the part of Christians, it is doubtful if it could have been so customary without authoritative, ecclesial reading of the biblical text.23 A clear partiality towards Jesus of Nazareth exists throughout the New Testament and in early Christian literary works. In the first centuries of Christian biblical interpretation, the study of Scripture was frequently seen as an examination of Jesus Christ. It was Christ, not the written text of Scripture, who provided God’s full unveiling of Himself.24 He was the source and summit of revelation and was encountered within all the sacred writings. When Jesus chided the Jews for setting false hopes on Moses,25 he

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23 For example, cf. Matthew 2:15’s understanding of Hosea 11:1, “Out of Egypt have I called my Son,” as fulfilled in the infancy of Jesus. Purely inductive analysis of the passage in Hosea could not come to Matthew’s conclusion. Or, consider the multiple uses of apparently disparate Old Testament texts brought together into a single Christian focus in Hebrews 1. Ultimately, a Christocentric lens provided by an apostolic believing community was needed to make such interpretations. Faith in a living and present Christ was required to “hear” the Scriptures correctly, but it was the Church which instructed that faith.


25 John 5:45.
was moving their attention to himself, the ultimate referent of the text. A “greater” one had come among them.\textsuperscript{26}

Christocentrism unified the biblical text. Despite the diverse literary structure of Scripture, exegetes perceived a single heart belonging to the text: the mystery of Christ. While most Christian exegetes agreed that the Scriptures existed in “unbroken” and “perfect” unity, they also perceived that the sacred text was pointing beyond itself. Christ, as the divine, eternal word,\textsuperscript{27} was the one who gave meaning to the written text.\textsuperscript{28} Origen of Alexandria did not see two words of God, one textual and the other personal, any more than he saw two Spirits of God.\textsuperscript{29} Instead, the one “divine Logos,” which was with God in the beginning, was the voice behind all revelation. “The complete Word of God … is not a multitude of words. It is a single Word consisting of several ideas, each of which is a part of the whole Word.”\textsuperscript{30} The diverse “words about each doctrine, being like parts in a whole or forms in a species” were all “uttered” by the same Logos.\textsuperscript{31} For most patristic authors, the Scriptures were seen as a diverse collection of texts with an overarching


\textsuperscript{27} John 1:1.

\textsuperscript{28} Cf. Matthew 5:17.


unity; in them, the one God had revealed his only Son.\textsuperscript{32} For Bernard of Clairvaux, only the “Lamb” who had been “slain” could open the book.\textsuperscript{33}

While affirming the divine inspiration and perfection of Scripture, early Christians did not necessarily consider Christianity to be a religion of the book; instead, it was a religion of the living Word of God, Jesus Christ. This was because they saw revelation to be more than propositional statements or principles about Christ. Instead, revelation was the actual unveiling of the living Christ, who engaged the reader of Scripture in the living Church. For Christians, the Son of God was the Logos himself; he was the one who “revealed” the gospel in “revealing” himself.\textsuperscript{34} Acceptance of God’s personal revelation in Christ led to participation in his life through baptism. Ignatius of Antioch, a “man devoted to unity,” directed those who refused to “believe” anything that

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Origen, \textit{John} Vol. 1, 5:5–6, 163–164. Although this work is not focused on the reception of the Scriptures by heretics, it is helpful to remember that Gnostics from the second century credited some portions of the Old Testament to various divine and demonic powers, while orthodox Christians considered all Scriptures as being sourced in God. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, \textit{The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)}, vol. 1, \textit{The Christian Tradition}, 93. Neither will this dissertation focus on the polemic surrounding the development of the biblical canon. Among those within the Church, disagreement certainly occurred over the canonicity of some texts, but substantial accord continued concerning the majority of the texts. For example, Theodore of Mopsuestia did not consider Canticles as part of the canon because of its carnality, but Origen wrote commentaries and homilies on the text with the conviction it was inspired. Despite some particular disputes among theologians over which texts Christ unified, the assumption that Christ indeed unified the Scripture was predominant.


\textsuperscript{34} Origen, \textit{commentarii in Jo.} in Origen of Alexandria, \textit{Commentary on the Gospel According to John: Books 13–32}, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1993), 20:1, 205. Cf. de Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 389, where de Lubac says that, for Origen, Christ the Logos is “truly incorporated” in the Scripture. The Logos, for Origen, was “not properly” “incarnated” in the text of Scripture as he is in the human Jesus; however, in a true way, Christ the Logos still “dwells” in Scripture, “not just some idea of him.”
they could not find written in the texts\textsuperscript{35} of Scripture to the living Christ. “To my mind it is Jesus Christ who is the original documents. The inviolable archives are his death and resurrection and the faith that came by him.”\textsuperscript{36} The bishop was pushing the people to penetrate deeper than the letters on the page, and to seek for more than the original intent of a biblical author. The one who reads Scripture aright encounters the hidden presence of Christ. Jesus “illumines all the pages of the book in which he dwells.”\textsuperscript{37} Christian orthodoxy should be understood in this Christological light. Right doctrinal belief included confession, but transcended it; orthodox faith had its grounding in the living person of Jesus Christ, and it was only accessible for those who were willing to “come to” the “assembly” of “God.”\textsuperscript{38} Any list of dogmatic propositions and even Scripture itself was ultimately rooted in Christ’s person and discovered in Christ’s Church.

Orthodoxy was an authoritative interpretation of the text in the light of the disclosure of Jesus Christ. Bernard expressed no desire for “a mute and written word traced with dumb signs on lifeless parchments, but an Incarnate, living Word.”\textsuperscript{39}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{35} For Ignatius, this would have been the Old Testament.}


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{37} De Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 386}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{38} Hebrews 12:23–24.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{39} Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Missus Est, Homily IV: The Annunciation and the Blessed Virgin’s Consent,” in \textit{Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent and Christmas}, 72. The immediate section reads as Mary’s desire and prayer:

\begin{quote}
May the Word which was in the beginning with God be made flesh of my flesh according to Thy word. May He, I entreat, be made to me, not a spoken word, to pass unheeded, but a word conceived that is, clothed in flesh which may remain. May He be to me not only audible to my ears, but visible to my eyes, felt by my hands, borne in my arms. Let Him be to me not a mute and written word traced with dumb signs on lifeless parchments, but an Incarnate, living Word vividly impressed in human form in my chaste womb by the operation of the Holy Ghost.
\end{quote}

Benedict XVI used this section of Bernard to argue that Christianity is not a religion of the book, but a religion of Christ the Word of God. (Benedict XVI, “Verbum Domini,” The Vatican, September 30, 2010,}
The tension caused by a Christocentric reading of Scripture demonstrated that it was an ecclesial reading, and not exclusively an inductive conclusion. Although Origen admitted “we have some ideas in common” with philosophers, he likewise said that the truth is known “alone” to those “who have the religion of Jesus.”

The gospel was foolishness to the Greek mind because it lacked wisdom. To the Greek, truth transcended the changing history of the world; it was permanent, disembodied, and ahistorical. Christians prompted scandal by claiming that the divine Logos which pre-existed time became human. Suddenly, a historical being was considered the full reality of truth! In similar manner, the Christocentric gospel troubled the Jews by its claim of fulfillment. The Christians did not claim that Christ brought yet another sign promising a beatific future, a sign God’s people could trust in. Instead, Jesus stepped forward as the one who fulfilled the promise here and now. The assumption that the truth of God was perceived in the glorious face of Christ was absurd to those outside of the Church, but it was consistent with the faith preached in the Church.

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40 Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3:81, 182.

41 1 Corinthians 1:18–25.


44 Matthew 5:17.

45 2 Corinthians 4:4–6
Ecclesial Exegesis

Most biblical interpreters prior to the Reformation assumed that the Church was sacramental; it was Christ’s tangible presence in the contemporary world. God’s presence among his people made the temple holy.\(^{46}\) This implied that the written gospel, the Church’s book, needed to be interpreted within the Church. The Church was subordinate to the Trinity just as a house was subordinate to him who dwells in it. God, the Father Son and Spirit, resided in his temple, thus making it a holy Church,\(^{47}\) an “institution” whereby the world engaged God.\(^{48}\) It was referred to as Christ’s Body,\(^{49}\) and was seen as a divine extension of Christ, the Head.\(^{50}\)

Christian salvation involved being united to God through his Son’s earthly body.\(^{51}\) Most assumed, therefore, that the fullness of Christ’s effective presence\(^{52}\) was located in his ecclesial body, the Church. “Outside this House, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved.”\(^{53}\) “He can no longer have God as his Father who has not the Church for his Mother.”\(^{54}\) To forsake the Church meant a forfeiture of Christ himself, and a return to

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\(^{46}\) Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:16–17.

\(^{47}\) Augustine, The Enchiridion, 56, NPNF-1, 3:255.


\(^{50}\) Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18.

\(^{51}\) Ephesians 2:16.


\(^{54}\) Cyprian, De Unitate Ecclesiae in Cyprian, On the Unity of the Church, 1:6, ANF 5:423.
death. As late as the time of the Reformation, Cyprian’s views were still assumed by one such as John Calvin. God had gathered his sons into the “bosom” of the Church, the “visible church,” which was needed to “beget and increase faith within us.”55 These views demonstrate the assumption behind the declaration of the bishops at Nicea. Belief in “one holy, catholic, and apostolic church” was part of the Christian confession.

The first three attributes of the Church all really came down to the fourth.56 The question of what united the Church, defined it as catholic, or made it holy was answered in what made it apostolic. The Church had been founded upon Christ’s apostles, who appointed their own successors. Therefore, an apostolic church was one that was in accord with the teachings and hierarchical leadership handed down by the apostles “in unbroken succession.”57 This was Irenaeus’ contention against the Gnostics. They had no succession, no tradition, no bishops, and no preeminent church founded by actual apostles. Conversely, the Christians had “true witness of the tradition of the apostles,” which extended to the faithful everywhere.58 The catholicity of the Church, the “universal brotherhood,” indicates both the local and universal unity of God’s people.59 It is called catholic because “it extends over all the world…and because it teaches universally and


completely one and all the doctrines which ought to come to men’s knowledge.”

The kingdom of heaven is attained when, in this unique church, one receives instruction and acts virtuously. A local church was identified as catholic when it was in unity with its local bishop, and universal unity was the accord among all bishops. It included more than right doctrinal confession. Actually, reverence to God and the bishops were considered indistinguishable.

The claim that the Church was the “pillar and buttress of the truth,” implied that it was also the authoritative medium of the gospel. Just as the Incarnation was more than an appearance and orthodoxy was more than right thinking, the essence of the Church transcended a composition of those who thought correctly or individually followed Jesus. It was an organic, mystical Body of Christ, replete with integrated spiritual and material realities. Its charismata included the authority to interpret Scripture.

Through the Incarnation, divine revelation had occurred in visible, historical terms; God was manifest in the flesh. The interpretation of that revelation likewise called for a visible, historical underpinning. The apostolic Church fulfilled that role by divine mandate. Analogous to the Incarnate Christ, the apostolic Church was at once

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64 1 Timothy 3:15.

65 Cf. Matthew 18:15–20; 28:20; Acts 10:43–48. In the Acts passage, notice Peter’s presumed authority to “command” that baptism be made available to Gentiles. Peter was not inventing a new doctrine of inclusion for Gentiles, but was elucidating, in light of the gospel, the fuller meaning of the “prophets.”

66 1 Timothy 3:16.
visible, historical, and spiritual; it was the mystical Body of Christ.\textsuperscript{67} Christ founded the Church on the apostles and commissioned them to disseminate his life and teachings. However, he promised to be with the apostles, guiding them in all their activities.\textsuperscript{68} Subsequently, apostolic interpretation of Scripture was seen as Christ’s reading of the text. The bishops who succeeded the apostles were likewise considered to be gifted by Christ’s Spirit to continue the faithful transmission of the gospel. They were charged with maintaining the apostolic proliferation of the Word of God, “preserving the tradition of the blessed doctrine delivered directly from the apostles.”\textsuperscript{69}

The conviction that the living Spirit had influenced the formation of the hierarchy\textsuperscript{70} implied the Scripture was to be interpreted in the Church. Both the spiritual essence and visible structure of the Christian community were gifts of God’s grace; every “ligament” and functioning “part” was sourced in Jesus Christ\textsuperscript{71} and formed by the Spirit.\textsuperscript{72} The idea of ordained hierarchy was partially based on faith in the Incarnation. At Chalcedon, the Church formally declared the faith that two natures were united in Christ’s one person. This declaration was consistent with already existing ecclesiology. For Ignatius of Antioch, the people needed to “be subject” to the “bishop and the

\textsuperscript{67} Ephesians 1:23; 5:32.

\textsuperscript{68} Matthew 28:20; John 14:15–18; 20:22; Acts 1:8.

\textsuperscript{69} Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1:1, ANF 2:301.

\textsuperscript{70} Ephesians 4:11.

\textsuperscript{71} Ephesians 4:16.

\textsuperscript{72} Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, where both aspects are in view.
presbytery”73 “in this world.”74 The leaders are to be esteemed as gifts according to God’s clear determination. The bishops were “appointed the world over”75 according to “God’s mind,” and they “reflect the mind of Jesus Christ.”76 For Ignatius, the bishops represented the Incarnate Christ. Subjection to the bishop and presbytery created a harmonious music of love and Jesus Christ,77 which enabled the Church to speak in unity as a choir. The Church was the setting in which the people of God “learned Christ,”78 and only those within the Body who were “gifted with the grace of the Spirit”79 were to expound its mysteries. Certainly, exceptions existed to bishop-led biblical interpretation in the Church,80 but it was generally the bishops in succession with the Apostles, and ecumenical councils, who provided the theological parameters for biblical interpretation. The relationship between a hierarchical Church and Scripture places Tradition in an informative light.

**Tradition and Exegesis**

Early interpreters of Christian Scripture understood the implication of a sacramental Church; the Scriptures needed to be interpreted in the Church’s living

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76 Ibid.


78 Ephesians 4:20.


80 E.g., Origen of Alexandria and Evagrius Ponticus.
Tradition. Origen expected the exegete to “approach all the Scripture as one body,” and not “break or cut through” the harmony throughout the whole composition.\textsuperscript{81} He listed some of the commonly accepted boundaries for theology as including monotheism and the subsequent unity between the testaments, Christology, Pneumatology, rewards and punishment, human free will, the general existence of evil spirits, final judgment, and the divine inspiration of the biblical texts.\textsuperscript{82} The only exegesis of Scripture to be believed was the one which “in no way conflicts with the tradition of the church and the apostles.”\textsuperscript{83} Even the exegetical “daring”\textsuperscript{84} of one like Origen nevertheless had to occur within the “definite” lines and “unmistakable” rules handed down.\textsuperscript{85}

While debates over the correct biblical interpretation of certain passages were common, orthodoxy was normally considered the first rule of hermeneutics.\textsuperscript{86} However, orthodoxy required more than the Scriptures. Prior to Origen, Irenaeus had already asserted that “we must keep the rule of faith,”\textsuperscript{87} that which “the elders, the disciples of the apostles, have handed down to us.”\textsuperscript{88} For Irenaeus, the rule handed down by the apostles included several articles of faith related to God and humanity, Old Testament preparation

\textsuperscript{81} Origen, \textit{John}, 1:10:107, 278.

\textsuperscript{82} Origen, \textit{On First Principles}, I: Preface: 3, 8.

\textsuperscript{83} Origen, \textit{On First Principles}, 1: Preface: 2, 2.

\textsuperscript{84} Origen, \textit{On First Principles}, 1:7:3, 61.


\textsuperscript{88} Irenaeus of Lyons, \textit{On the Apostolic Preaching}, 1:1:3:42.
for the New Testament, and salvation wrought by the Son of God.\textsuperscript{89} For Gregory of Nyssa, on one hand the “Holy Scriptures” were “the rule and the measure of every tenet,” “the guide of our reasoning."\textsuperscript{90} On the other hand, if one doesn’t “draw” “divine teaching” from “the stream of faith,” then he will turn the “true water” “of the Hebrews” “into blood.”\textsuperscript{91} Through apostolic Tradition, Gregory’s exegete was expected to draw divine truth from the living stream of the Church. These and other interpreters did not perceive apostolic Tradition to be constraining; instead, they saw it as a guide toward discovering the full truth of sacred revelation in Jesus Christ.

The Church and its Tradition were understood by Christians to be in unity with Scripture, not in opposition to it. “We preserve both the doctrine of the Church of Christ and the greatness of God’s promise.”\textsuperscript{92} Certainly, the texts of the New Testament were authoritative, the written, inspired word of God. However, the written texts alone were never the floor of Christian faith. Georges Florovsky noted that Ignatius’ reference to Christ as the “original documents” demonstrated that the reality of the God-Man Jesus Christ and the living experience of his redemption were the grounding of Christian faith. However, these authoritative “documents” were known “through the tradition, through that which was delivered, through the deposit, which was preserved and handed down.”\textsuperscript{93}


\textsuperscript{92} Origen, \textit{Contra Celsum}, 5:22, 281.

The bishops helped preserve the Tradition, and that is one reason why Ignatius, in nearly all of his extant letters, directed the people to be in communion with their local bishops. For Ignatius, explication of Scripture necessarily flowed out of immersion in the internal life and external form of the Church. Christians were to be “subject to the bishop as to the grace of God, and to the presbytery as to the law of Jesus Christ.”94 The one who scorns the bishop “that is visible…seeks to defraud the One who is invisible. In such a case he must reckon, not with a human being, but with God.”95 For Ignatius, submission to the bishop was necessary to preserving the doctrine of Christ. Without the bishops, the Tradition would be jeopardized and the Scriptures not understood in their fullness.

Over time, and often through controversies,96 Scripture and Tradition were understood by theologians to be interrelated. Certainly, the Scriptures were the authoritative and supreme97 demonstration of the Church’s faith. Nonetheless, they required apostolic Tradition to be properly interpreted. For example, when defending the doctrine of the deity of the Holy Spirit, Basil used liturgy to assist in his interpretation of Scripture. For Basil, any attack on “unwritten customs” would “fatally mutilate the Gospel.”98 “It is those never content with accepted ways who despise the old as being

95 Ignatius, *Magnesians* 3:2, 95.
96 Cf., for example, the many conflicts involving the Gnostics.
stale, constantly welcoming innovation, like worldlings who are always chasing after the latest fashion...But as for us, what our Fathers said, we repeat.”

Great diversity of thought existed in the post-apostolic period within the churches, which naturally developed into debates over biblical interpretation. Many of those who professed to believe in Christ held “conflicting opinions not only on small and trivial questions but also on some that are great and important.” However, although the polemics of exegetical controversy were severe and even abusive at times, bishops often prevented extreme interpretations perceived to be damaging to the Christian faith. Exegetes employed various literary tools in an effort to gain insight to the full significance of a sacred event recorded in Scripture, but it was the Church’s leadership that provided the interpretive understanding of the event. An episcopal ecclesiology certainly did not create a straight line of uniform agreement among theologians, but it helped prevent radical departures from Christian Tradition. Origen’s reply to Celsus shows that the one who independently reads the Scripture does not know how to read it at all. The enemy of the altar, the rebel, was the one who despised the local bishop and priests. Heretics were the ones who read the Scripture outside of God’s house.

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103 Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church* 1:17–1 8, ANF 5:427. It should be noted that Origen, too was accused of interpreting Scripture independent of the Church’s authority. His ordination into the priesthood, which occurred in Caesarea, was hotly contested by his opponents, specifically Demetrius, his Bishop back in Alexandria.
Grammar, history, allegory, and other literary devices were utilized to varying degrees, but they were all incapable to govern the entire interpretive process. A methodical system could not thoroughly exposit the text. Instead, a spiritual vision conveyed by traditional faith was first required to establish valid interpretive boundaries.

Christianity in its “primitive” days undoubtedly displayed a “vast diffusion of local congregations, each living its separate life,”¹⁰⁴ and each called a church. However, onlookers could also detect a broader, universal consciousness. For Ignatius of Antioch, a “common name and hope”¹⁰⁵ bound all the people through their bishops. Upon the death of Polycarp, the church at Smyrna communicated the news to “the church of God sojourning in Philomelium, and to all the congregations of the holy and Catholic Church in every place.”¹⁰⁶ At the time of his death, Polycarp was reported as praying “for the whole Catholic Church throughout the world.”¹⁰⁷ The New Testament imagery of a single Head unifying the multiple parts of one Body, or a Vine as the single source of various branches was indelibly imprinted on the consciousness of the Christian people. The New Testament writings themselves express theological diversity, reflective of a variety of Christian communities. However, there appears to be an overarching apostolic faith operative behind New Testament texts.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, the “vast diffusion” of congregations

¹⁰⁵ Ignatius, Ephesians 1:1, 88.
¹⁰⁷ Martyrdom of Polycarp, 151.
¹⁰⁸ Despite great diversity in New Testament literature, there is a recurring emphasis on events surrounding Christ’s death and resurrection. Of the small number of pericopes which appear in all four gospels, many have distinct differences from each other, and are placed at different moments in the life of Christ (for example, the Cleansing of the Temple). However, most of the small number of pericopes which do appear
and theological polemics after the apostolic period appears to have largely operated under an assumption of universality. Even an exegete like Theodore of Mopsuestia, who did not see an allegorical interpretation of the Church in the *Song of Songs*, saw the Church as a sacramental symbol of future life in heaven. The Church made the eschatological reality of heaven present in type.\(^\text{109}\)

**Presumed Textual Unity**

Ecclesial faith provided the exegete with the assumption that diverse texts of Scripture contained an underlying unity. Although the philosophical foundations of biblical interpretation shifted over time, and methods of exegesis differed throughout patristic and medieval eras, a “realistic”\(^\text{110}\) reading persisted. Many exegetes concluded that not all biblical accounts were to be taken factually, as a “pure history of events,”\(^\text{111}\) but nearly all concurred that the texts were truthful. In the rare moments when the sacred text spoke of events that some considered unbelievable and non-factual, such as universal creation in six days or an actual garden east of Eden, the conclusion was that the divine author was attempting to prompt the reader to a deeper investigation of revelation.\(^\text{112}\)

Nothing in Scripture was “absurd,” but all was “in accord with God’s character;”\(^\text{113}\)

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\(^{110}\) The basic assumption was that the text related to reality. Cf. Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative; a Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 1–16.


\(^{112}\) Ibid.

Scripture was the product of neither dishonesty nor naiveté. “It is plain that nothing false can ever underlie the literal sense of Holy Writ.”¹¹⁴ The Fathers of the Church might contradict each other at times, which was puzzling. However, “a contradiction within Scripture was unthinkable.”¹¹⁵

With the exception of obviously nonliteral passages, biblical revelation was assumed to narrate real human history. Christian redemption was not accomplished in the imagination, but in factual reality.¹¹⁶ For numerous exegetes, the presumed distance between narrative and actual history was short. Scripture’s narrative intersected the entire human saga; its sequential events were interpreted as parts of a single world history, governed by one God. The storylines portrayed in the Scriptures were assumed to be the real history of the world. It “describes all times and periods from the beginning of the world until the Day of Judgment.” The Holy Spirit has “given us” the book of Scripture to understand the “beauty of the orderly governance” of all creation and times.¹¹⁷ Scripture revealed world history by recounting “a series of events which have really transpired.” Without this revelation, some historic knowledge would not be accessible. As Gregory the Great stated in the early Middle Ages, the sacred Scripture “declares a mystery, and has the art so to tell the past, that merely by that alone it knows how to

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announce the future.‖¹¹⁸ Holy Writ, from the beginning, could never be reduced to a book of myths or simply a “manual of the inner life.”¹¹⁹

One of the clearest needs for the exegete was the aptitude to distinguish between literal and figurative statements in the sacred text. The sacred texts were seen as internally consistent, and the greatness of certain Fathers, like Augustine, was found in their deep immersion in Scripture and their ability to authentically expound the faith from it. Some biblical statements literally meant what they said. Others were figurative and signified something else.¹²⁰ In order to lessen ambiguity, the interpreter needed a firm “knowledge of language” and “knowledge of things.”¹²¹ Linguistic skills allowed the interpreter to understand idioms, identify faulty translations, and comprehend literal meanings of words. Examples of “things”¹²² included the nature of animals, plants, numbers, human customs, and other items used as similitudes in Scripture. These tools helped the interpreter understand what was originally written, if it was a figurative passage, and how it could meaningfully translate to his modern audience. The unity of Scripture meant the exegete was free to use clearly “manifest” passages in Scripture to help interpret the “obscure” portions. The one illumined the other.¹²³ A capable


¹¹⁹ Henri De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, 44.


¹²² In Latin, “res.”

¹²³ Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, 2:9:14:42–43. “Then, having become familiar with the language of the Divine Scriptures, we should turn to those obscure things which must be opened up and explained so
commentator was justified in this method so long as the derived meaning was “not contrary to right faith.” Further, a skilled exegete could derive multiple meanings from a single passage as long as the interpretation was consistent with clear statements expressed elsewhere in the sacred text. God had “generously and abundantly provided” that words can be interpreted in various ways. Bernard of Clairvaux likened the exegete who extracted multiple meanings from a single text to the “valiant” woman in Proverbs who produced separate pieces of clothing for her household from a single “scanty stock of wool.”

All of this worked under the assumption that the authors who “created the Scripture” did so through the agency of the Holy Spirit. “Meaning is dependent upon truth.” The whole Christian truth, alive in the apostolic Church, furnished meaning to every individual passage. Since the Scriptures were “inspired by the divine Spirit,” then explication of them must harmonize and agree “in all respects.” For Augustine, all exegetical efforts must submit to “diligent scrutiny” until the simple rule of “charity is produced.” The goal of hermeneutics must be “love from a pure heart, and a good

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125 Ibid.
conscience, and a sincere faith.”130 Within these guideposts, the activity of biblical interpretation could flourish.

**Unity between the Literal and Spiritual Meanings**

Allegorical interpretation of Scripture was a prevalent method which sought to demonstrate the unity between the Old Testament Scripture and the New Testament gospel. However, such interpretation was the articulation of the faith already present in the Church.131

The spiritual interpretation of Scripture was common in the early centuries of Christianity, and was used to explicate the rule of faith.132 While not seeking to escape from the literal difficulties of the text, spiritual exegesis provided the interpreter with a way to articulate the kerygma already in the churches. Allegory served as a gloss of the biblical text, a tool that unified the obscure elements inherent in the sacred text and alive in the Tradition of the Church. It united the testaments into a single Scripture, and articulated the silence existent in the margins of the sacred writings. Solomon’s “kiss” on the lips of his bride133 taught the Church what it already knew, that the Incarnation was an act of love. The story of Noah reminded the Church what the Apostles had taught them, that God had a single source of salvation, set on wooden planks, in which only a

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131  de Lubac *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 3, 73.


133  Song of Songs 1:2.
few would participate.\textsuperscript{134} Paul used allegory when he wrote that the “Rock” in the Exodus narrative “was Christ.”\textsuperscript{135} Spiritual interpretation helped bring out Christian truth latent in all the Scriptures, the “tacit”\textsuperscript{136} knowledge of Christ already within the believing community.

Allegory was not a luxury, but was employed to demonstrate the unity of the testaments. It was natural for Christianity to identify a deeper meaning of Scripture anchored to the literal text. Given the fact of the Incarnation, and even Paul’s use of the term “allegory,” it was common for early exegetes to search, although in different manners, for the deeper unifying sense of holy Writ. All sought to convey the unity between the testaments, the intersection where the New fulfilled the Old without destroying it.\textsuperscript{137} Unlike Marcion, Origen claimed for himself that he did not divide the testaments.\textsuperscript{138} He was able to refute both the attacks of Jews and Gnostics by showing the unity of the gospel with Moses. The presumed Christian unity of the testaments was bound up with the whole idea of Tradition. This sort of reading of Scripture penetrated the faith of the Church and led the reader back to the simplicity of home.\textsuperscript{139} It is questionable if spiritual interpretation of Scripture would have flourished as it did without an ecclesial faith already in place.

\textsuperscript{134} Cf. Romans 8:20–21.

\textsuperscript{135} 1 Corinthians 10:4.

\textsuperscript{136} Louth, Discerning, 73–95.


\textsuperscript{138} de Lubac, History and Spirit, 57.

\textsuperscript{139} Louth, Discerning, 131.
Allegorical reading of the biblical text was a point of contention among interpreters of Scripture. However, exegetical conclusions on most sides of allegorical debates were frequently within the range of traditional faith due to pre-established warrants. Authoritative ecclesiology circumvented a purely mythical interpretation which carried little regard for concrete history and facticity. Most Christian allegorists rooted their interpretations in biblical history. Yet, authoritative ecclesiology prevented the extreme of wooden Biblicism, which refused to see a second level of meaning to the text beyond the literal. Those exegetes more disposed to literal, textual studies still admitted deeper meaning to the sacred texts. Some individuals at both ends of the polarized debate over allegory exceeded established boundaries at times. However, Tradition, authoritatively employed by bishops, often helped keep dissimilar theologians within the same field of fidelity. One outlying form of allegorical interpretation employed by a number of early Christian exegetes gave little or no regard to the literal, historical sense of Scripture. The “aim of the exegete” using this method was exclusively “to elicit the moral, theological, or mystical meaning which each passage…is presumed to contain.”

The literal sense was secondary to the deeper meaning inherent in the story. However, this form was not necessarily representative of the bulk of allegorical interpretations. Christian allegory usually attempted to plant itself more firmly in the literal text and in “a biblical view of history.” Events and personages of the Old Testament were real, but they prefigured or anticipated the events and people of the New Testament. Old

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Testament passages provided a true account of an event, but they pointed beyond the event. The goal of the exegete was to perceive the spiritual reality to which the natural event pointed.

Notwithstanding divergent opinions on the nature and role of allegory, most interpreters of Scripture assumed a second level of meaning to the biblical text. It is not uncommon for contemporary evangelicals to set the Antiochene and Alexandrian methods of exegesis in opposition to each other, and claim one method to be more susceptible to “heresy” or the other to be more capable to “enter into the Bible.” However, this distinction is often exaggerated. Although some, such as Origen, more freely employed allegory, all understood it was a biblical term and a “fundamental exigency” in exposition. This was true in both Antioch and Alexandria. Events of history were recorded in Scripture “as examples to us,” and their exposition was not superfluous because reading the text must be followed by understanding it.

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143 This insight or spiritual perception was known as theoria.

144 Cf. Greer, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Exegete and Theologian, 110.

145 This work will maintain the term “allegory,” even though some early Christian studies from the twentieth century, including evangelical works, preferred the term “typology.” Cf. R. C. Sproul, “Ligonier.org,” (http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/typology-versus-allegory.), as an example of evangelicals who reject allegorical interpretation of Scripture because they errantly think it strips the text of meaning. One concern over using the term “allegory” was that it implied Greek influence in Christian theology. Others misunderstood the term as referring to a disembodied, spiritual interpretation which had little regard for the literal meaning of a biblical passage. This is a mistake because Christian use of the term frequently assumed the value of history and literal meaning. Some prefer the phrase Figural Reading, Typology or Contemplative Reading. This work will maintain the term “allegory” for consistency. The term is found in Galatians 4:24, de Lubac’s works emphatically use it, and Allegoria is the term frequently used by Latin Fathers to characterize what they were searching for in Scripture. Cf. Louth, Discerning, 96.

146 de Lubac, Medieval Exegesis vol. 2, 84.

147 1 Corinthians 10:6.
Theodore of Mopsuestia often displayed an antipathy towards allegorists “who have great zeal for overturning the meaning (sensus) of divine Scriptures and by breaking up everything placed there.” His concern was that “they fabricate for themselves certain foolish fictions and give their folly the name of allegory.”

Theodore’s frustration that some allegorists were “breaking up” (intercipere) the narrative of Scripture, saying that “paradise did not exist as paradise nor the serpent as the serpent,” led him to conclude that by “breaking up the narrative, they no longer have a narrative.” In other words, Theodore complained that the allegorists separated select words or parts of Scripture from the whole text; they extracted pieces of Scripture, and devised meanings that contradicted the entire passage under review. Theodore’s commentaries on Paul’s epistles demonstrate that he gave great effort to understanding the logic of the literal text of Scripture, and was especially keen to the order and flow of a literary passage. Theodore’s overriding concern was that the literal sense would be lost in popular allegory. Exegesis must follow the example of the Apostle, “who does not do away with the narrative, nor does he get rid of what happened long ago.”

Despite Theodore’s aversion to popular allegory, the facts of the text did not preclude a spiritual meaning for him; fulfilled prophecies demonstrated that the text can

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149 Cf. Greer’s introduction to *The Commentaries on the Minor Epistles of Paul*, xiv. For Greer, the Latin term used by Theodore’s translators emphasizes a “separation.”


be used beyond its narrative intent. Allegory, to Theodore, was a valid exegetical method with subsequent moral applicability; it was “the comparison made by relating events that had already taken place to present circumstances.” Allegory did not precisely mean the same to Theodore as it did to others, but it still provided him with a deep and relevant Christian understanding of the text.

Theodore may have been justified in his wariness over some less constrained interpretations of Scripture. However, it is incorrect to assume, as some commentators do, that allegorists generally sought to go “beyond” the text or that the literal meaning was “really beside the point.” Ideally, allegory was not a method of having a text say something it did not confess. Instead, while patristic exegetes often sought the spiritual meaning of a text behind the literal reality, they did not dismiss the literal text as superficial. Christian allegory did not essentially oppose the literal narrative, but was used as a tool to unite the entire canon at once. The words, events, and people in Scripture were shadows of higher realities; they spoke of further mysteries. The literal and historical meaning was a portal to the full meaning of a passage. At times, this

152 Greer, introduction to *The Commentaries on the Minor Epistles of Paul*, xiv–xvi.


156 Greer, *Mopsuestia Exegete and Theologian*, 92.


unity may have appeared lopsided in some explications of a biblical passage, but that was partly because the facts were only the first indication of the significance of the story.\textsuperscript{160} The history and human elements of the passage were valuable, but certainly not worth studying for their own sake. “We have drawn the thin lines of history; now let us set our hand to allegory.”\textsuperscript{161}

Contrary to some accusations, Origen did not dismiss the literal text in his exegesis. Unlike his “brethren” who could only read the account of the Exodus in the Greek Septuagint, Origen based his antagonism towards the celebration of Quartodecimen on the Hebrew lexicon. The Eucharist could not be a Christian Passover for Origen because the original Hebrew definition of the word Passover\textsuperscript{162} did not suggest “suffering” as the Greek \textit{Pascha} did, but referenced a “crossing over.” Origen based his theological understanding of Christ as our Passover\textsuperscript{163} on the lexical meaning of a word located in the Jewish Torah. Biblical exegesis assumed a high degree of unity in its labors; for early exegetes, a harmony between the literal text and its deeper meaning needed to be maintained.

The assumed secondary meaning within Scripture led to more than a search for doctrinal verities to be believed; it also inspired an emphasis on the moral life of the

\textsuperscript{160} de Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis} vol. 2, 41.


\textsuperscript{163} 1 Corinthians 5:7.
believer. Jesus Christ and his redemption was the guiding vision of biblical interpretation. He was the focus of the entire canon because he unified the complete text, and his cross was the key to its interpretation. However, when allegorical interpretation did not focus on the Redeemer, then it was usually attentive to the redeemed people, the Church. Pope Gregory wrote that Sacred Scripture “changes the heart of him that reads it from earthly desires to the embracing of things above.”

Theodore of Mopsuestia, in his exposition of Titus, pursued “the pattern of true religion” that “must be learned by all, so that denying ungodliness and perversity, we may …display our life both chaste and pure in all respects.” The truthfulness of the biblical narrative made it spiritually relevant; exegesis was intended to unite theology and morality. However, this was only possible with a pre-existing ecclesial faith.

Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra’s (d. Paris 1349) distaste for foundationless allegory earned him a contemporary title of “foremost exponent of the literal sense.” Yet, even Nicholas worked under the assumption of a secondary meaning to the biblical text. Nicholas devoted much of his labors to biblical exegesis, and created a “revision” of the Glossa Ordinaria. He read Hebrew, knew the various Jewish commentators, and was

164 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis vol. 1, 237.
especially familiar with the exegetical works of the famed Rabbi Rashi.\textsuperscript{169} In the second prologue of his \textit{Postilla}, Nicholas argued that the literal sense of Scripture was the foundation for all mystical interpretations. He argued that translations, including the Vulgate,\textsuperscript{170} needed to be corrected by reference to the Hebrew. He was disgusted with fanciful allegorical studies of his time if they obscured the literal sense of the text. However, although he insisted on an astute literal exegesis, Nicholas maintained the need for a mystical exegesis of Scripture. The Scripture, to Nicholas, was as the Book of Revelation described it, “written within and on the back.”\textsuperscript{171} The outside of Scripture dealt with the literal sense of the text, but the inside with the mystical or spiritual sense. The deeper meanings can be multiplied legitimately, but the literal must remain the foundational meaning. A theological interpretation which has no literal basis will collapse as a building which “parts company” with its foundation.\textsuperscript{172} However, the danger of interpreting Scripture too “literally” is that it becomes too “fleshly,” and has a certain “dishonorable and improper”\textsuperscript{173} quality about it.\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{169} Lesley Smith, \textit{The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary} (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 225–228.

\textsuperscript{170} Cf. Nicholas, \textit{The Postilla of Nicholas of Lyra on the Song of Songs}, 29, where Nicholas comments on Song 1:1. “First, our (Latin) translation frequently disagrees with the Hebrew text...”

\textsuperscript{171} Revelation 5:1.

\textsuperscript{172} Cf. Hazard, \textit{Literal Sense}, 3–4; Nicholas’ second prelogue to his \textit{Postilla Literalis}.

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Inhonestum et illicitum}.

\textsuperscript{174} Nicholas of Lyra, \textit{The Postilla on the Song of Songs}, 28–29.
Interpretive Unity through Church Authority

A formal, ecclesial faith, safeguarded by bishops, helped keep Christian theology buoyant. If needed, the Church had the authority to decide on the best interpretation of Scripture. Although contemporary evangelicals may not agree with the final determinations the Catholic Church made during the Eucharistic controversies, they need to appreciate the resilient effect authoritative ecclesiology has had on orthodox theology. One example is found in the Eucharistic controversies surrounding Berengar of Tours. Although most evangelicals may not agree with the final determination of the Church in this dispute, it is helpful to understand the presumed role of the Church in biblical polemics. The eleventh-century Eucharistic controversy involving Berengar of Tours demonstrated that when dispute arose regarding the reading of Scripture, all sides of the debate assumed the role of the Church to maintain unity in faith. The Eucharistic controversy was one of the most significant debates in the Middle Ages because of its intricate relationship with grace and redemption.\(^{175}\)

The debate spanned centuries, raised numerous theological issues, and involved multiple individuals in the Church. The significance of this dispute reveals underlying assumptions regarding the Church’s relationship with the Scripture.

Berengar of Tours (999–1088) was a renowned scholar and theologian who helped revive the tools of dialectic argumentation in the French cathedral schools. Berengar brought negative attention to himself by disputing the substance of the Eucharist after it had been blessed by the priest. At the heart of the debate was the

interpretation of Christ’s words in Scripture, “This is my body.”"\(^{176}\) Prior to the eleventh century, patristic sources were “vague” in addressing polemics regarding the Eucharist, and the same patristic authors were used on both sides of the debates.\(^{177}\) In the Augustinian tradition of the day, the difference between any “sacrament” and the “true body and blood” was unclear.\(^{178}\) The now familiar term “Transubstantiation” was not even coined until decades after Berengar’s death.\(^{179}\) Berengar received his understanding of the Eucharist from the Church. However, he used reason, which he considered the image of God within humanity,\(^{180}\) and Tradition in an attempt to articulate what seemed “vague” to him and others. In the end, his controversy helped the Catholic Church better formulate its own position.

The controversy surrounding Berengar had to do with the real presence and change in substance in the Eucharist. Berengar disputed the claim that the bread and wine became the “true”\(^{181}\) flesh and blood of Christ at consecration. How could there be two bodies of a single Christ, one in heaven and the other on earth?\(^{182}\) Did Paul not claim that we no longer know him according to the flesh?\(^{183}\) The general response to Berengar was

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\(^{180}\) Chadwick, “Ego,” 431.

\(^{181}\) The same flesh that was in the Virgin’s womb and was crucified.


\(^{183}\) 2 Corinthians 5:16.
that just as the earthly body of the resurrected Jesus transcended natural laws, so the Eucharistic body could be both in heaven and earth. Berengar was especially antagonistic towards the idea that the original substance of the bread and wine was converted or destroyed. For Berengar, even if the Eucharist became true flesh and blood, the elements remained bread and wine; they did not lose their original nature during consecration.

Although Berengar used Scripture to argue his position, he did not revert to naked Biblicism. He relied on an Augustinian tradition, and employed grammar and logic. He partially based his dispute on the empirical fact that the physical appearance of the elements was not changed. If the physical appearance of the elements was not converted, then it was logical to conclude that their substance “survived” consecration as well. Berengar made strong appeal to Patristic interpretations of Scripture supporting his views, especially Augustine and Ambrose. A sign, according to Augustine, was to inspire and lift one’s thoughts to the reality signified; it was not intended to be transformed into the actual reality, thereby destroying the sign. How could we chew Christ’s flesh if Ambrose taught us that Christ’s glorified flesh was immutable? To make his point, Berengar utilized multiple biblical illustrations, patristic passages, liturgy, the canon of the Mass, as well as logic.

Berengar’s opponents, notably Lanfranc of Canterbury and Alberic of Monte Cassino, likewise supported their interpretation of Scripture with Tradition and reason. They countered with the claim, supported by Ambrose himself, that the Eucharist was the

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184 Radding and Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics*, 35.
185 Radding and Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics*, 181.
186 Radding and Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics*, 30–32.
same as the body given to Christ by the Virgin, suggesting Berengar misquoted Milan’s Father of the Church. In addition, the entire Christian world believed such things. “All those who rejoice to be called Christian, glory in the fact that they receive in this sacrament the true flesh of Christ and the true blood of Christ, each taken from the Virgin.” Berengar’s scholarly reputation forced his opponents within the Church to develop their own philosophical tools to refute him. They accused Berengar of asserting that the Eucharist did not become “true blood and flesh” at all, which denied the very words of Scripture. If the bread and wine were not transformed, then the sacrifice of the New Testament was not “superior” to the Old Testament, as the letter to the Hebrews clearly states. They argued that God was not constricted by created nature, but was able to change the very substance of anything. Like Berengar, they also brought a plethora of biblical texts and other patristic writings to bear on the issue. Ultimately, however, Alberic began his letter to Pope Gregory VII, in which he called for a “decisive judgment” against Berengar, by stating “how contrary” Berengar’s views were “to the Catholic faith.”

In 1059, Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida (1015–1061) “extracted from Berengar a reluctant assent to a toughly worded confession of belief in physical


190 Radding and Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics*, 83.

191 Radding and Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics*, 283.
Berengar, fearing for his life, assented to Humbert’s specific point that the change that occurs in the bread and wine occurs in the realm of the five senses, not just in the mental realm. Soon after this coerced admission, Berengar disavowed his assent, claiming that Humbert’s formula was internally inconsistent and ultimately unorthodox. Berengar was certainly not a symbolist, as Zurich’s Zwingli would be centuries later; he believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Instead, Berengar’s contention was with the annihilation of the bread and wine.

After Humbert’s death, debate continued within the Church over what type of change occurred at the consecration. After other assents and retractions, Berengar, aware of the capital consequences of heresy, finally recanted his views in 1079. Berengar died in 1088, angry and bitter at his opponents because he had been personally hurt by the pope and councils, and forced to be untrue to himself by recanting. Despite the politics involved, claims of false accusations, and personal animosity towards his opponents, Berengar neither rejected the Catholic notion of the Church, nor did he leave the Catholic Church. Actually, his revival of dialectic reasoning served the Church’s developing ability to employ reason and faith in its theological endeavors. Catholic schools continued to debate for four centuries if what Berengar signed was really an orthodox statement at all. Clarity took time; however, the Church and its ordained bishops ultimately provided that precise determination.

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193 Chadwick, “Ego,” 416.
It would be naïve to suggest that the conflicts in the Church were purely theological. Most clashes were marked by political, financial, and social interests. Nonetheless, the assumed conjunction between the Church and sacred text persisted among theologians, in varying degrees, throughout multiple disputes. Augustine’s interpretation of Isaiah 7:9, “Unless you believe, you will not understand,” persisted throughout the Middle Ages. Faith in the revelation safeguarded in the Church was the starting point of theological reason. Faith seeks, but understanding finds and clarifies; reason confirms what is often already known and loved. The Church’s faith was understood by biblical exegetes to be a resource for reason; it supplied a store for rationality. The foundational revelation proclaimed by the Church was meant to be logically analyzed; it was not set up as a rival to human reason. This presumption persisted from Augustine, through John Scotus Eriugena, Richard of St. Victor, Anselm, Abelard, and multiple others in the Church.194

Disagreement over the interpretation of Scripture was inevitable, but the basic idea of the role of an ordained episcopate in the interpretation of Scripture was commonly accepted. An apostolic Church did not neatly resolve all tensions; however, its ordained hierarchy provided the environment for dispute between theologians while seeking to prevent polemics from getting out of control. Church Fathers disagreed, sometimes vehemently, regarding the rank given to either the literal or spiritual aspects of Scripture. However, all agreed the biblical text contained both aspects. Exegetes who were wary of certain biblical commentators still understood the need for an allegorical interpretation if

one was to believe in a New Testament. Ideally, bishops would illuminate the boundaries of fidelity within which exegesis would occur. Doctrinal ripeness took generations, even centuries, to come into maturity.

**The Rise of Biblicism**

**Noticeable Flaws within the Church**

A survey of the development of modern Biblicism will assist evangelicals in understanding some of their own milieu.

Over the centuries, various polemics and troubling affairs in ecclesial life contributed to a diminished estimation of the relationship between Scripture and Church. Nonetheless, even in the late Middle Ages most Christians, even after the commencement of the Reformation, still looked to the Church to interpret its own Book. However, various forms of Biblicism began to emerge which increasingly challenged the traditional relationship between Church and sacred text. For some, the cold reality that the Church was neither “one” nor its leaders “holy” helped undermine the fundamental assumption that the Church needed to be the official interpreter of Scripture.

The “plague,” the “cancer,” of the Great Western Schism risked mass apostasy and confirmed fears that the Church was becoming detached from itself. For Pierre Janelle, it was neither the doctrine of the Catholic Church that was to blame, nor was it a flawed hierarchical structure. Rather, it was “anarchy.” A good entity was being abused. Central power in the Church was lost to national rivalries and provincial councils. Local churches were swayed by ambassadors from nearby princes. The Church was fragmented.

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195 Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*, 72–73.
at multiple levels,196 and had gone from “bad to worse.”197 The papacy itself was “scarred, deeply troubled, even reeling.”198 Not only had the Great Western Schism and other political struggles “undermined” the credibility of the papacy, it had also “made ambiguous” who it was to be obeyed.199 Was it pope or council that held ultimate authority? If one gave the nod to the papacy, then which pope?

The lives of several medieval ecclesiastical leaders countered the assumption that the Church was “holy.” Their debauchery damaged the Church’s reputation as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. “Ecclesiastical rogues”200 in high leadership in the Catholic Church caused many to reexamine if church leaders could possibly hold the keys to God’s kingdom. Despite severe ecclesiastical condemnations to the contrary, simony was commonplace. Innocent VIII (1484–1492), strapped for money, created unneeded positions in the Curia and sold them to the highest bidder. Alexander VI (1492–1503) reputedly sired several children as Cardinal, and more as pope. Other Church leaders, such as Dominican Girolamo Savanarola, who preached against the abuses of sacred office, were persecuted. Julius II (1503–1513) owed his office to his uncle’s nepotism, and was reputedly elected pope with the help of bribes. The first of the Medici popes, Leo X (1513–1521), was accused of depleting the papal treasury through his extravagant lifestyle. On a local level, the people noticed that their bishops were often

199 Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*, 110–112.
absent from their dioceses, not caring for their flocks, and that many cardinals lived in luxury. It appeared that everything in the Church was for sale. Even the satire of the day referred to gluttonous monks, lecherous friars, and gullible priests.\textsuperscript{201} In 1514, shortly after the death of Pope Julius II, Erasmus of Rotterdam anonymously published \textit{Julius Exclusus}, a satirical narrative of the refusal of Peter to let the recent Pontiff into heaven because of his worldliness.\textsuperscript{202} After similar complaints, more people began to question if deference to corrupt leaders was necessary. Apostolic obedience required apostolic holiness! Even if the identification of the true successor of Peter became clear, what obligation did one have to a wolf wearing sheep’s clothing? The disparity between Scripture’s call for holiness and the lives of contemporary ecclesiastical leaders led many to doubt the Church’s claim to be the instrument of God’s salvation and interpreter of sacred texts. Within this milieu, an authority was sought after that would be free of tainted Tradition and corrupt churchmen, a rule that was able to hold fraudulent leaders accountable. For some, the text of Scripture fulfilled the necessary role.

\textbf{Biblicism in the Early Reformation}

Biblicism, as it is used in this dissertation, has a long and complex history dating back to the Middle Ages. Antecedents of post-Reformation Biblicism can be detected in conflicts such as those surrounding the Waldenses and Hussites, as well as in the development of philology during the Renaissance. However, for this study, Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation provide definitive moments of its ascendancy. During the

\textsuperscript{201} O’Malley, \textit{Trent}, 32–34.

rise of Biblicism, the role of the Church in biblical interpretation was diminished.

Luther’s 1518 meeting in Augsburg with Cardinal Cajetan provides a clear entry point for noting the rise of modern Biblicism.  

**Luther and Cajetan**

After Luther issued his ninety-five theses October, 1517, he gained the attention of Rome by early 1518. The Augustinian friar had called for reform of the preaching of indulgences. Luther viewed the current practice of indulgences as providing false security to people and undermining any impetus to live holy lives. Luther thought his criticisms were in continuity with the Catholic Tradition and in concert with Scripture and Church decrees, but his opponents refuted those assumptions. Albrecht of Brandenburg, Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg, perceived Luther’s challenges as potentially obstructing the lucrative practices of indulgence preaching. Luther, it was feared, might seriously undermine Albrecht’s plan, approved by the Curia, to apply half the income gained from indulgences to paying off the archbishop’s debt incurred in gaining his bishopric. In addition, Luther’s theology of penance appeared to possibly challenge the pope’s authority to grant indulgences. Albrecht, under counsel from theologians and canonists at the University of Mainz, determined higher intervention was necessary, and referred Luther’s complaints to Rome.  

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203 This dissertation intends to provide an overview of select key moments in the development of Biblicism as it later affected American evangelicalism. Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive picture of Biblicism, including other significant movements and historical persons who are not mentioned in this work.

204 Jared Wicks, *Luther's Reform: Studies on Conversion and the Church* (Mainz: Verlag P. Von Zabern, 1992), 149–150.
Tommaso de Vio, known as Thomas Cajetan, Cardinal and a reputed theologian and administrator, was delegated as papal legate by Pope Leo X to resolve Luther’s case with a determination of the friar’s orthodoxy. Luther’s meeting with Cardinal Cajetan in Augsburg in October of 1518, marks a decisive point in the Reformer’s developing view of the relation of Church and Scripture. Up until August of 1518, young Luther’s view of the Catholic Church’s ability to authoritatively issue judgment on doctrinal issues was positive. Of all churches, Christ preserved “this one church on earth by so great a miracle.” “Never in any of its decrees has it parted from the true faith.” Although this does not amount to perpetual infallibility, it affirms young Luther’s esteem for the historic role of the Catholic Church in the interpretation of Scripture. After a survey of Luther’s few available works, including his *Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses*, Cajetan did not provide a wholesale condemnation of Luther’s theology as others had done. Rather, he called for Luther to recant and submit to the Church on just two points of error.

First, in his fifty-eighth thesis, Luther argued that the pope’s basis to grant indulgences was merely from the power of the keys; it did not stem from the merits of Christ and the saints, which are found within the treasury of the Church. The Catholic

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206 Quoted in Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 51. Hendrix cites the original location in *Luther’s Werke* as 1.662.31–38. Luther, here, was referring to the Church at Rome. Cf. Martin Luther, “Proceedings at Augsburg” in vol. 31 of *Luther’s Works*, 263.

Church taught that indulgences, as exemptions from the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven, were granted from the treasury of merits in the Church. The pope, based on this view, was within his rights to grant these merits back to the people in the form of indulgences. For Luther, the pope’s power to “loose” in indulgences was limited to the temporal ecclesiastical sphere on earth; the power to “work grace for the inner man” could only be the work of the gospel. “The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.” Luther’s concern was that the preaching of indulgences was replacing the preaching of the gospel, and causing people to trust in indulgences for their salvation. According to Luther’s twenty-sixth thesis, the pope’s keys gave him no power over souls in Purgatory. Instead, as a pastor, the pope was supposed to intercede for those in Purgatory. Similarly, the pope could not grant, via the keys, what people were responsible to earn themselves; his authority was limited to the ecclesiastical sphere. Luther’s concern with the contemporary indulgence practice was that it freed people from the responsibility of doing good works to earn their own merit. Luther was not necessarily opposed to the idea of a treasury of merit within the Church, but he did not think the pope had sole custody of it. God had given the responsibility of

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208 In Catholic teaching, the temporal punishment of Purgatory is not about eternal punishment. Those in Purgatory are forgiven of their sins. Purgatory is a final purification by fire for those who are already friends of God. The punishment they endure is temporal, and does not jeopardize their eternal pardon in Christ. “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.” Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sec. 1054, The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/archive/eng0015/_index.htm., 1030.


merits to everyone. For Luther, to argue that “the saints had done enough for us” was to speak “without proof from the Scriptures, the teachers of the Church, and sound reasons.”\textsuperscript{212} Quoting Paul, Luther argued that “each shall receive his wages according to his own labor.”\textsuperscript{213}

Cajetan argued that Luther, by denying the right of the pope to grant indulgences from the treasury of the Church for Christians in Purgatory, had contradicted the sense of the Church. “We have not made this up arbitrarily.”\textsuperscript{214} All the faithful saw indulgences as “affecting their debt of temporal punishment to God as well as their obligations to the Church.”\textsuperscript{215} By limiting the pope’s access to the merits of the Church, Luther had incorrectly dichotomized two spheres of Christian existence, the one before God and the other before the Church.\textsuperscript{216}

Second, in his seventh thesis, Luther argued that “God does not remit guilt unless there is prior remission by the priest.”\textsuperscript{217} This was considered consistent with Christ’s statement, “Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”\textsuperscript{218} However, in explaining his thesis, Luther emphasized the necessity of an attitude of faith when one receives absolution from his priest. “The person who is to be absolved must guard himself very carefully from any doubt that God has remitted his sins, in order that he

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[212]{Luther, “Thesis 58” in “Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses,” 222–223.}
\footnotetext[213]{1 Corinthians 3:8.}
\footnotetext[214]{Cajetan, \textit{Cajetan Responds}, 57.}
\footnotetext[215]{Wicks, \textit{Luther’s Reform}, 167.}
\footnotetext[216]{Cf. Wicks, \textit{Luther’s Reform}, 167.}
\footnotetext[217]{Luther, “Thesis 7” in “Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses,” 98.}
\footnotetext[218]{Mt. 16:19.}
\end{footnotes}
might find peace of heart."\textsuperscript{219} A most certain “persuasion” of faith must be produced in
the recipient’s heart if forgiveness is to be truly received. For Luther, faith needed to be
more than a general confidence in the power of the sacrament; it included a specific
conviction of personal assurance. To receive forgiveness, the penitent must believe that
Christ’s grace was personally applied. The fruit of receiving the sacrament in faith was
peace of conscience, consolation, and certitude that one’s sins were forgiven and he was
in God’s grace.\textsuperscript{220} “This peace, therefore, is that sweetest power, for which, from the
depths of our hearts, we ought to give the greatest thanks to God.”\textsuperscript{221}

Cajetan objected that Luther was introducing a new type of faith, one that insisted
on certainty as a salvific imperative.\textsuperscript{222} Again, Cajetan saw Luther’s teaching as contrary
to the sense of the Church. Residual doubt had always been “deeply woven” into the
fabric of the life of the Church. Cajetan referred to Job 9:21, “And if my heart is divided,
my soul will not know it.”\textsuperscript{223} He also referenced the prayers offered after communion,
which claim unworthiness and fear of having received the sacrament unworthily, even by
those who had confessed and been absolved.\textsuperscript{224} For Cajetan, Luther deemphasized
contrition. Salvific faith, according to the legate, was never perfect within any Christian
on earth. Due to the defective nature of humans, one could never have certainty that his

\textsuperscript{219} Luther, “Thesis 7” in “Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses,” 100.

\textsuperscript{220} Wicks, Luther’s Reform, 171.

\textsuperscript{221} Luther, “Thesis 7” in “Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses,” 101.

\textsuperscript{222} Cajetan, Cajetan Responds, 23.

\textsuperscript{223} Cajetan, Cajetan Responds, 52.

\textsuperscript{224} Wicks, Luther’s Reform, 173.
contrition was sufficient to attain forgiveness. However, for Cajetan the presence of faith, even if flawed, made one worthy to receive the grace conferred by the sacrament.

Cajetan argued that Luther contradicted the sense of the Church in his two errors. Luther argued that the Church had made no binding decree on the subjects he contested. More importantly, Luther was convinced the Bible supported his views. At the end of their meeting in Augsburg, Cajetan stopped short of declaring Luther’s views to be heretical, although he called for correction of the friar’s errors. Instead, he privileged Luther’s request for a binding decision from the pope on the topic of indulgences. In his ninety-five theses, Luther was confident the pope would be disgusted if he only knew the true practice of indulgences in Germany. He considered the pope to be a “good pope, but a victim of bad advice.” Luther’s appeal to the pope through Cajetan was sent by the friar with cautious optimism. He had hoped that his appeal would persuade Leo toward a favorable decision.

Leo X quickly responded, issuing the bull Cum Postquam on November 9th, 1518. The bull clearly declared that the pope through the keys opens heaven to those in purgatory and accesses the merits of the Church for indulgences. His authority transcends the earthly ecclesiastical sphere. A decision regarding Cajetan’s second charge against Luther, namely, that Luther insisted on a positive disposition in the recipient, was

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225 Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 62.

226 Heresy is defined as persisting in error after one’s error has been formally pointed out by competent authority. At this stage, it would have been premature for Cajetan to determine that Luther was a heretic.

227 Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 64–65.
temporarily suspended in the bull.\textsuperscript{228} Luther received a copy of \textit{Cum Postquam} in early 1519. Luther rejected the bull, and considered it unbinding because it simply repeated old teachings that in themselves were not binding. The entire bull was simply an assertion of pontifical authority; it furnished no scriptural arguments, patristic authority, canon law, or rational argument. Luther publicly made known his opposition to \textit{Cum Postquam} in the Leipzig debate later in 1519.\textsuperscript{229} Luther had lost his canonical appeal, and began to prepare for excommunication.

Events surrounding Luther’s meeting with Cajetan demonstrate a subtle but significant shift in the development of Biblicism. In a matter of months, Luther’s posture had shifted from a readiness to submit to the Church to a dissent from the Church’s formal declaration. In his retrospective \textit{Proceedings at Augsburg}, written within weeks after his meeting with Cajetan, a growing conviction within Luther becomes more evident; he was increasingly pitting Scripture against Church and Tradition. “Above all,” Luther avowed that he cherished and followed the “holy Roman Church,”\textsuperscript{230} but he also understood that only papal declarations “which are in agreement with Holy Scripture” ought to be obeyed.\textsuperscript{231} Any believer can refute the pope provided he uses “better authority or reason” because “the pope is not above but under the Word of God.”\textsuperscript{232} Luther considered it to be common knowledge that “the popes are accustomed to doing

\textsuperscript{228} Wicks, \textit{Luther’s Reform}, 182.

\textsuperscript{229} Wicks, \textit{Luther’s Reform}, 185.

\textsuperscript{230} Martin Luther, “Proceedings at Augsburg” in \textit{Luther’s Works}, vol. 31, 263.

\textsuperscript{231} Luther, “Proceedings at Augsburg,” 265.

\textsuperscript{232} Luther, “Proceedings at Augsburg,” 266–267.
violence to the Holy Scriptures in their decretals.”233 The “dubious twisting of the words of God and falsifying of meaning” within such decretals needs to be set in opposition to the “true and proper meaning of Scripture.” The ecclesiastical “jurists” emphasize “their traditions, whereas we theologians preserve the purity of Scripture.”234 Luther’s tension between Church and Scripture and his gradual movement towards Scripture alone is noticeable at this early stage. He loved the Roman Catholic Church. However, he claimed to hate those who, in the name of the Church, twisted the gospel. In his letter to Cajetan, his “most reverend father in Christ,” Luther referenced Acts 5:29. “As long as these Scripture passages stand, I cannot do otherwise, for I know that one must obey God rather than men.”235 Increasingly for Luther, God’s directives were primarily found in the text of Scripture. The Church was not to be trusted.

In July of 1519 Luther debated Johann Eck at Leipzig, further asserting that popes and councils might fail, and that Scripture alone is where Christian faith should rest. “There is but one thing that we have to believe, namely, what Scripture teaches.”236 Through the various issues addressed at Leipzig, Luther’s growing Biblicism became more obvious. Even at Leipzig, while Luther sought to maintain some divine authority for the pope, he did it with circumspection. The Bishop of Rome needed to mend his ways; the current idea of divine right of the papacy was repugnant. Luther warned Eck

233 Luther, “Proceedings at Augsburg,” 279.

234 Luther, “Proceedings at Augsburg,” 284.

235 Luther, “Proceedings at Augsburg,” 275.

not to join the crowds who too highly extolled the pope. Yet, Eck countered Luther’s arguments. The two argued over the interpretations of 1 Corinthians 3, Galatians 1, Matthew 16, and other related passages, with Eck claiming support from the *Glossa Ordinaria*. Both Eck and Luther cited Church Fathers to support their arguments, but Luther insisted that even if all the Fathers asserted the current understanding of the primacy of the pope, they could not overthrow the biblical texts which spoke otherwise. The direction of Luther’s arguments was increasingly focused on the text of Scripture; in the light of certain biblical passages, Luther argued that the Catholic Church had exaggerated the understanding of the divine right of the pope.

Eck labelled Luther a defender of heretics. Eck claimed that Luther’s teachings were in line with the Hussites, who were condemned at the Council of Constance. Only a heathen would disregard the infallibility of such a council! Luther rejoined by claiming he was not in opposition to Constance. He tried to distance himself from the Hussite heretics, claiming he could not be grouped with the Bohemians. He based his defense on the biblical text. The Leipzig Debate reveals that Luther increasingly saw Scripture as potentially opposed to Church, councils, Tradition, and the papacy. Sole reliance on the Bible was progressing in his theology.

In June, 1520, Leo X issued *Exsurge Domini*, which directly named Martin Luther and threatened him with excommunication if he persisted in the “pernicious

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poison” of his “errors.” In January of 1521, Pope Leo X issued the bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem*, excommunicating Luther from the Catholic Church. Luther was soon called to defend his views in front of Emperor Charles V at Worms. At Worms, Luther famously declared his “conscience captive to the Word of God,” and if necessary, subsequently opposed to Church and Tradition.

**Luther and Latomus**

During this early phase of the Reformation, one of Luther’s fiercest opponents was Jacobus Latomus from Louvain. Latomus specifically attacked Luther’s arguments in the Leipzig debate, and his well-known assault on scholastic theology. Luther’s June 1521 response to Latomus demonstrates his maturing Biblicism. He had moved from one who sought to affirm the Catholic Church to an outsider. His security in Scripture alone became obvious in his reply to Latomus.

Luther objected to Latomus’ call for moderation, prayer, and patience because it amounted to toleration of the pope. For Luther, it was possible to oppose the Church on the basis of Scripture. “It is never right to go against the Word of God even if it means setting a man in opposition to the pope.” Latomus censured Luther’s teaching that sin remained after baptism, and he used Gregory the Great to support his censure. In response, Luther pitted Gregory’s teachings against the “authority of Paul.” Latomus stated that Luther’s teaching that not every mortal sin needed to be confessed to a priest

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was condemned by council. Luther retorted by asking, “What Scripture supports this council?” Throughout his long reply to Latomus, Luther repeatedly brings his contentions back to the plain reading of sacred text. His palate had rejected the taste of biblical faith mingled with human corruptions. “My soul is nauseated at having to eat bread baked with human dung.” Luther believed he could understand the plain Scripture apart from the living Church. He was willing to set himself against ecclesial traditions, even those affirmed by saints, because he perceived the Church had set itself against the Scripture. “I do not ask myself what Bede says, or what any man says. I ask what they ought to say. One must look to God’s Scripture only.” Luther, at one point of his reply, directly addressed his reader: “At this juncture, dear reader, I entreat thee to be a free Christian man. Swear no allegiance to the words of any man. Stand loyally by the word of Holy Scripture.” Luther’s desire was to study the “pure unadulterated Scriptures in all their glory, undefiled by any man, even the saints.” As Luther’s Biblicism solidified, his criticism of other theologians was increasingly based on their alignment with Scripture. He justified his own polemical views by their established footing in the Bible. The victor in theological debate was more biblical than his opponent; he was not necessarily one who was in favor with the Church.

243 Luther, Reply to Latomus, 318.
244 Luther, Reply to Latomus, 344.
245 Luther, Reply to Latomus, 331.
246 Luther, Reply to Latomus, 333.
247 Luther, Reply to Latomus, 344.
Radical Reformation and Spiritual Exegesis

After Luther’s excommunication, other forms of Biblicism developed rapidly outside the confines of the Catholic Church, and it was not uncommon for them to conflict with each other. Protestants in the Radical Reformation felt that Luther had neither gone far enough in denouncing the Catholic Church nor in separating Christianity from earthly princes. The development of distinct forms of Biblicism can be detected in some of their radical responses.

Through Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525), for example, new evangelical ideas of the Reformation progressed without the “support and constraint” of princes.\(^{248}\) At first, Müntzer “fully accepted Luther’s Reformation standpoint.”\(^{249}\) However, his support soon changed to criticism. While in some ways Müntzer begins “in Luther,”\(^{250}\) he breaks with Luther at significant points. For this reason, historians often place Müntzer in the second generation of the Reformers. Müntzer concluded that although Luther attacked the clerical monopoly on religion through his words, he failed to attack it with deeds.\(^{251}\)

Although the truth had “dawned” on Luther, in the end Luther had abandoned and neglected it. Müntzer likened Luther to the malicious raven sent out of Noah’s ark; he


began well but did not return with the message of peace. Müntzer was disdained by the magisterial Reformers, such as Luther and Melanchthon, who both considered him a fanatic.

In regards to biblical exegesis, Müntzer presented an antithesis of Spirit and Scripture, the inner and outer Word. For Müntzer, the appeal to Scripture’s authority can only satisfy the “invented” faith of learned “scribes.” The Bible gives witness to its reader, but it does not impart faith. Many of the biblical authors themselves, men full of faith, did not have Bibles. For Müntzer, the criterion for determining the validity of the “outer” witness of Scripture can only be found in the human heart. Müntzer taught that the Holy Spirit provided direct instruction to believers in the form of visions, dreams, and “inspired exegesis.” The ecstatic utterance from an uneducated “simple” charismatic expositor was more authoritative than the carnal exegesis of learned theologians, and it certainly surpassed ecclesiastical declarations. For Müntzer, the elect were now privileged with direct visitation from God. Not only was the true believer liberated from the Catholic Church’s oppressive doctrine, but now he could interpret Scripture even more accurately than Luther because of the inner Spirit. The lack of ordination or education was not an obstacle to exegesis if one had the Spirit. Müntzer’s emphasis on


253 Ibid.

254 Ibid.

255 Williams, The Radical Reformation, 127.

256 Ibid.
what some have termed an “existential experience” demonstrates that for him, the evidence of religious truth was subjective. Faith advanced in experience.²⁵⁷

Practically, Müntzer’s inner light of the Spirit appeared to undermine the supremacy of the objective Scripture. Three of Müntzer’s more radical parishioners in Zwickau, all laymen, travelled to Wittenberg in early 1522, during Luther’s absence, and convincingly argued against infant baptism. Their interpretive authority was based on the Spirit’s guidance in their particular reading of the Bible. These laymen, later called the Zwickau Prophets, disturbed Wittenberg and early Protestantism with their inspired enthusiasm and new doctrines.

Müntzer’s spiritual reading of Scripture joined itself to social unrest. He interpreted the apocalyptic passages of Scripture in the light of his own day. The wealthy German rulers were the reprobates whose destruction was prophesied in the Book of Revelation. His followers who struggled against affluent land owners were inspired by this exegesis to actually revolt, trusting that Christ would deliver them. As a result, thousands of revolting peasants were slaughtered by the German princes during the Peasants’ War of 1525. Once the spiritualists had severed their historic relationship with not only the Catholic Church, but their own Protestant brethren, they made themselves vulnerable to private biblical interpretation. They read the Bible anew to fit their own concerns, resulting in a violent application of sacred texts. Luther’s well-known

“particularly harsh attitude” towards the peasants was due in part to Müntzer’s key role in the rebellion. \(^{258}\)

A similar separatist impulse was found among Anabaptists, specifically those in south and central Germany and Austria. \(^{259}\) Some were less violent than Müntzer, but still emphasized that the written Word, with all of its paradoxes, could not be interpreted without the Holy Spirit. \(^{260}\) Hans Denck (1495–1527) taught that the Holy Spirit directly joins the interpreter in the exegetical process. The Scriptures could only be understood, and sectarianism, already a noticeable problem within Protestantism, avoided if the Spirit directly guided the exegete. \(^{261}\) The Bible is a light, but only a lantern in the darkness. More light than Scripture was needed. The biblical interpreter must immediately experience the Morning Star arising in his heart prior to fully dispelling the night and understanding the Scripture. \(^{262}\) The inner Word of God united with the Holy Spirit and enabled the exegete to properly appropriate the text of Scripture. \(^{263}\) The Anabaptists used texts such as Luke 12:11, where Jesus promised the Spirit’s immediate help to articulate

\(^{258}\) Nipperdey, “Thomas Münster,” 105.

\(^{259}\) Klaus Deppermann, Werner Packull and James Stayer argued that the Anabaptism of southern and central Germany and Austria was distinct from the Anabaptism that originated in Switzerland. Cf. Stayer, The German Peasants’ War, 77. Also, cf. Klaus Deppermann, Werner O. Packull, and James M. Stayer, “From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins,” Mennonite Quarterly Review 49 (1975): 86. In the 1975 article, the argument is made that Anabaptism has three distinct origins: Switzerland, South Germany and Austria, and the Netherlands. Cf. the discussion on Anabaptist diversity in Thomas N. Finger, A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 51–56.

\(^{260}\) Williams, Radical Reformation, 250.

\(^{261}\) Williams, Radical Reformation, 252.

\(^{262}\) Ibid.

\(^{263}\) Williams, Radical Reformation, 256.
the faith in crises, to buttress their spiritual hermeneutics. It is noteworthy that the inclination for direct spiritual interpretation did not necessarily preclude the Anabaptists from group study of sacred Scriptures. Balthasar Hubmeier (1480–1528), for example, emphasized the need for agreement, even submission if necessary, to the inspired solidarity of the questioning faithful. Nonetheless, even in a communal setting, the Spirit’s direct affirmation was needed.

Different Anabaptist theologians, under their new warrant of spiritual authority, sought to restore a pristine Christianity. “An Eden in the past” was pursued; the scandal of recent times needed to be removed. The Scripture alone, free from centuries of corrupted Tradition but interpreted by a living spiritual exegesis, provided the design for genuine Christianity. The Anabaptists rejected infant baptism and provided a symbolic theology of the Lord’s Table; believer’s baptism and memorial communion were celebrated. They sharply separated between Church and State. The Church was exclusively composed of true believers; those in sin were to be banned from the Fellowship. The true believer offered no oath to the carnal government. Anabaptists frequently criticized Luther and his followers as still beholden to the pope and Tradition, and placing their hope in civil magistrates. Through Anabaptist theologians, a noticeable modification of Biblicism was occurring within Protestantism, and some near the center of the Reformation movement were becoming aware of the challenges. Once the ordained

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264 Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 256.


Catholic bishops were removed, the text of Scripture was exalted to a position of primacy. However, the objective text was now being trumped by spiritualists who claimed to receive direct communication from God regarding the Bible’s interpretation. Although one strand of Anabaptism can be traced to Zurich in 1525, Swiss reformer Henry Bullinger later traced its visionary and revolutionary roots back to Müntzer’s Zwickau, and before that to Satan. To this reader, mainline Protestant Reformers were possibly beginning to sense the dilemma of interpreting Scripture without ecclesial warrant.

**Philology and Zwingli**

Partially in response to the subjective hermeneutics of the spiritualists, both Luther and especially Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) lay greater emphasis on the ability of philology to authoritatively interpret Scripture. During the Renaissance, literary scholars lay great stress on the value of philology. It was increasingly assumed that a literary text, whether religious or not, had a fixed meaning and that the right tools could reveal the original intent of its author. For some, recently developed skills of literary analysis provided the biblical scholar with the tools to most accurately determine the authenticity and meaning of the sacred texts. Over time, philology was increasingly seen by some Protestants as a sort of new Magisterium authoritatively determining the meaning of the Bible. When applied to biblical hermeneutics, philology could avoid

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267 Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1292.

ecclesiastical imposition on a text, as well as sidestepping dangerous individualistic spiritual interpretations.

For Zwingli, philology could counter the growing spiritualism within Protestantism effectively. The fanatics “have convinced themselves that no one but they themselves have the Spirit of God … they have rejected the knowledge and advice of so many highly learned wise men.” They are “unfit and early-ripe masters who proceed to teach what they have never properly learned.” Anabaptist errors became most evident in their rejection of infant baptism. These *Spiriteuseri* were “an evil party” who troubled both Lutheran and Reformed communities. For Zwingli, the discord spread by the spiritualists countered their claim that the God of peace was moving them with the prophetic Spirit. To Zwingli, “the Anabaptists act rather wrongly when they denigrate languages” because linguistic skill is the primary means of probing the depths of God’s mysteries. Philology, for Zwingli, was the key to unlocking the mysteries of divine revelation. “If we knew Hebrew as well as German, we should be able to fathom the Old Testament.”

Prophecy, for Zwingli, was preaching a learned exposition of the biblical text, especially the Old Testament. It relied on expert skill in Hebrew and Greek. For Zwingli, the miraculous gift of tongues mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 was learned linguistic

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abilities, in “Hebrew, above all else.”\textsuperscript{273} The divine gifts of oracle were not expressed in unprepared, ecstatic verbiage. Prophets, then, were those who used their philological skills to teach and make “known the meaning of Scripture to the entire church.”\textsuperscript{274} The prophetic task of building up the churches\textsuperscript{275} required the skill of mastering the two biblical languages or the three languages of the cross. New Testament prophets “must have been well versed in languages,” for their prophetic utterances consisted of properly translating the Scriptures from their original Hebrew into Greek.\textsuperscript{276} This teaching was Zwingli’s direct counter to the spiritualists within Protestantism. The learned gift of tongues was a divine gift to the Church, but it was not the frenzied unlearned babbling of the Anabaptists.

Although Luther and John Calvin (1509–1564) did not equate the supernatural gifts of tongues with philology, they did affirm the elevated distinction of the objective biblical text. The Bible, not the Church or its traditions, was the final authority and the sacred dwelling of God,\textsuperscript{277} and the solution for anarchic spiritualism. Since God’s people were corrupt, only Scripture could be regarded as the infallible voice of God.\textsuperscript{278}

One of the most prominent assumptions behind Protestant exegesis was the perspicuity of the biblical text. The technical literary skills of Renaissance scholarship,

\textsuperscript{273} Zwingli, “On the Preaching Office,” 158.


\textsuperscript{275} Ephesians 4:11–12.

\textsuperscript{276} Zwingli, “On the Preaching Office,” 159.

\textsuperscript{277} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, vol. 2, 4:8:12–13, 1160–1163.

\textsuperscript{278} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, vol. 2, 4:8:10–16, 1158–1166.
such as found in Erasmus’ Greek edition of the New Testament, helped the Reformers articulate the clear sense of Scripture over against the subtleties of medieval scholasticism. To Luther, it was a “wicked, base invention” to suggest a pope had ultimate authority to interpret Scripture. “What can the Church settle that the Scripture did not settle first?” No Church office or Tradition was needed to interpret the sacred text because “certainly these words are plain enough,” and “as clear as can be.” Luther esteemed the ability of any good Christian “among us” of accurately interpreting the Scripture if he has the “true faith, spirit, understanding, word, and mind of Christ.”

Luther chided those who claimed that some sacred passages were recondite and others plain. Any lack of clarity was the result of the reader’s blindness and dull wits, or ecclesiastical obstacles. Even the loftiest mysteries, such as the Trinity or Incarnation of Christ, are clearly seen in the literal text. For Luther, the sense of the Scriptures was immediately available to its reader. It is noteworthy that Luther’s understanding of the perspicuity of the text was not synonymous with later critical analyses of the Bible. Perspicuity, for Luther, was two-fold. The external perspicuity was accessible to all who could make a grammatical analysis of a passage. However, the internal perspicuity was

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280 Martin Luther, “An Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality as to the Amelioration of the State of Christendom” in Dillenberger, 414.

281 Luther, “The Bondage of the Will,” 173.

282 Luther, “An Appeal to the Ruling Class,” 414.

only possible through the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit was needed” for deeper comprehension because our hearts are darkened.284

Like Luther, Calvin was greatly influenced by the Renaissance, having mastered classic and modern languages. Calvin, too, advanced the perspicuity of the biblical text, although with his own distinctive emphasis. On one hand, Calvin emphasized the inspiration of the text; on the other hand, he argued that the reader must be inspired to understand the text.

For Calvin, revelation had a clear pedagogical purpose. A child of the light was “a pupil” of Scripture,285 and salvation was something that was to “become known,” resulting in a “pure knowledge”286 of God. Reverence and love of God, real piety, were the results of “the knowledge of his benefits.”287 Nature certainly was helpful to understand the Creator, but human vision remained hazy and “confused.” Holy Scripture cleared the person’s understanding; it was analogous to “spectacles” which helped people clearly perceive what was blurred due to their own deficiencies.288 The air of mystery surrounding expositions of Scripture could be dissipated by careful and logical analyses of the text itself. The Bible was perspicuous and unmediated.289 The biblical text divinely

284 Luther, “The Bondage of the Will,” 174–175. Luther’s emphasis on the inner life of the exegete demonstrates he was not a pure Biblicist.


287 Calvin, Institutes, vol. 1, 1:2:1, 41.

288 Calvin, Institutes, vol. 1, 1:6:1, 70.

authenticated itself, while the Church only published the opinions of men. By the written Word, God had rendered faith “unambiguous forever.”

Calvin’s stress on the educational function of Scripture demonstrates that he, too, was not a complete Biblicist. Rather, he also focused on the inspiration of the reader. Like Luther, Calvin had little interest in allegory, except where the Scriptures directly called for it; the literal sense of the text was the truest sense. However, the literal meaning could not be ascertained without spiritual illumination. God himself speaks in the text. The same Spirit who spoke through the prophets must “penetrate into our hearts to persuade us” of the meaning of the Scriptures. When the reader is “illumined,” he receives the highest certification of the authenticity of the biblical text. For Calvin, the need for illumination was not peripheral to exegesis, but provided the necessary intrinsic clarity of the sacred text. Calvin’s pneumatic reading was based on the assumption that the Word and Spirit were inseparably together by “a kind of mutual bond.” He sought the rich, spiritual meanings “inside the letter” of the text. While both Luther and Calvin acknowledged the need for the Holy Spirit to understand the text, they were distinct from the Anabaptists. They both stressed the necessity of applying learned philology in deciding the meaning of the sacred text.

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290 Calvin, Institutes, vol. 1, 1:8:5, 80.
293 Calvin, Institutes, vol. 1, 1:7:5, 80.
295 Calvin, Institutes, vol. 1, 1:9:3, 95.
296 David Curtis Steinmetz, Calvin in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 270.
Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin negated an inspired Catholic Church with ordained bishops, and they located God within the biblical text. They did not intend to denigrate the inward testimony of the Spirit in exegesis to a secondary, merely edifying status. They saw the biblical text as more than an historic artifact; they saw Scripture as a life-giving conduit of the Holy Spirit. Nor did they seek to raise the operation of the Spirit to the crucial role of biblical arbiter, as they perceived in the Anabaptists. However, their ongoing repudiation of an ordained Catholic episcopate allowed for conflicting developments in the continuing trajectory of Biblicism.

**Conflicting Biblicism in Marburg**

Despite the agreed upon supremacy of Scripture within Protestantism, there was no established mechanism to resolve conflict on significant interpretive issues. Protestants often regarded Scripture as the highest authority, but not everyone agreed to what it said. Biblicism did not provide harmony among God’s people; neither spiritualistic faith nor philology could prevent increased fragmentation between believing communities. This is evident in the Eucharistic dispute between Luther and Zwingli at Marburg in October, 1529. The two learned Protestant theologians and their respective German and Swiss parties met in colloquy at Marburg Castle in an attempt to resolve their differences on the Eucharist and possibly unite Protestantism. Those with Luther generally maintained a more traditional view of the objective efficacy of the sacraments than those who followed Zwingli.


Luther had masterfully detailed his theology of the Lord’s Supper in 1528\textsuperscript{300} in an effort to bring clarity to the doctrine. Unlike many later Protestants, Luther taught that Christ was really present in the sacrament when it was properly administered and that the sacraments “most assuredly” imparted grace when faith was present.\textsuperscript{301} In an attempt to unify Protestantism, Luther and other Wittenberg theologians drafted the seventeen \textit{Schwabach} articles in the summer of 1529, just weeks before Marburg. The tenth \textit{Schwabach} article affirms that “the true body and blood of Christ are truly present in the bread and wine.” Zwingli’s theology of the Eucharist denied the real presence, and saw the supper as only a memorial of Christ. Two years prior to the Marburg Colloquy, Zwingli had criticized Luther for putting “the most important part of salvation in physically eating the body of Christ … the gist of salvation in the eating.”\textsuperscript{302} Why would Christ give his real body to be eaten if he also taught that the “flesh profits nothing”?\textsuperscript{303}

The debate over the Eucharist was in reality a battle over the Bible.\textsuperscript{304} Luther and Zwingli each claimed to be more biblical than the other when the two failed to agree on the exegetical interpretation of the Bible.\textsuperscript{305} Philology did not supply the plain or

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\item \textsuperscript{300} Cf. the introduction to “Marburg Colloquy” in vol. 38 of \textit{Luther’s Works}, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{301} Martin Luther, “The Pagan Servitude of the Church,” in Dillenberger, 300.
\item \textsuperscript{302} Zwingli, “A Friendly Exegesis,” 244.
\item \textsuperscript{303} Zwingli, “A Friendly Exegesis,” 274.
\item \textsuperscript{304} David Curtis Steinmetz, \textit{Luther in Context} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 72.
\item \textsuperscript{305} Years later, Calvin would criticize Zwingli’s view of the sacraments because it reduced them to an oath taken by a soldier to his superior, a sign that binds a warrior to his commander. Zwingli essentially made the sacraments into an outward memorial, an intellectual reminder, of the Church’s fidelity to God rather than a remembrance of Christ’s fidelity to his people. Not only had Zwingli rejected the sacramental aspect of the rites, but he had transferred the meaning of the celebration to reflect the peoples’ faith rather than God’s fidelity. Cf. Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, vol. 2, 4:14:13, 1288.
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unambiguous sense of the Scriptures. Prior to the Colloquy, Zwingli accused Luther of “championing what is opposed to the authority of Scripture and thrust upon it a meaning which this same Scripture cannot admit.”\textsuperscript{306} During the colloquy, Luther challenged Zwingli with a Bible verse, “Prove that ‘This is my body’ is not a body.”\textsuperscript{307} At the end of the Colloquy, the two sides agreed on the first fourteen articles, which included a Trinitarian view of God, original sin in humanity, faith as a gift from God, and relations to civil authorities. They also agreed that “tradition or human ordinances in spiritual or ecclesiastical matters” cannot be allowed to “plainly contradict the word of God.”\textsuperscript{308} The plain meaning of Scripture must dominate church teachings and practices. However, they could not reach agreement on the fifteenth and final article; the plain meaning eluded them. “And, although at this time, we have not reached an agreement as to whether the true body and blood of Christ are bodily present in the bread and wine, nevertheless, each side should show Christian love to the other side insofar as conscience will permit, and both sides should diligently pray to Almighty God that through his Spirit he might confirm us in the right understanding.”\textsuperscript{309} Basically, the two Reformers shook hands and agreed to disagree. To this date, the Lutheran and Reformed churches remain at odds on Eucharistic theology. As much as philology had prevented imposition of ecclesiastical

\textsuperscript{306} Zwingli, “A Friendly Exegesis,” 261.


\textsuperscript{308} Marburg Article 13, as cited in vol. 38 of \textit{Luther’s Works}, 88.

\textsuperscript{309} Marburg Article 15, as cited in vol. 38 of \textit{Luther’s Works}, 88–89.
doctrine and avoided subjective spiritualistic interpretations, it could not provide the Reformers with certainty or unity.

Pietism

The growing emphasis on philology throughout the sixteenth century led to what some considered to be a dry scholasticism, or Protestant rationalism. True religion was reduced to right doctrinal confession derived from an astute analysis of the Bible. The fear of some Lutherans was that the deadness of the letter had resumed its dominance over the faithful. Emphasis on philology had reduced the need for the Spirit’s unction in the reading of the text. Without wishing to follow the excesses of radical reformers, some concluded that Lutheranism itself needed reform.

Pietism developed as a learned and ecclesiastically-based effort to renew Protestantism. It initially sought renewal within the confines of the Lutheran and Calvinist churches, without disavowing the need for scholarly handling of the biblical text. It emphasized the need for personal piety in the lives of those who held right doctrine. It was a devotional movement that perceived itself as the continuation of the Reformation, a Bible movement emphasizing holy living which naturally flowed from a regenerate heart.\textsuperscript{310} In response, the Protestant magistrates were critical of pietistic emphases within the churches; they feared that social unrest would result from the new evangelical fervor promulgated by the movement.

Immediately after affirming the *Augsburg Confession*, Johann Arndt (1555–1621) wrote that “purity of doctrine is of no benefit, when it is not adorned by a holy life.”\(^{311}\) The Christian needed more than “remission of sins” obtained “through faith;” he needed to learn how to live a “holy life.”\(^{312}\) Frankfurt’s Pastor Jakob Spener (1635–1702)\(^{313}\) inherited from Luther a deep dissatisfaction over the spiritual condition of the people of God. He was irritated with the lack of vitality among Protestants, and expressed distaste for the rigid confessional nature of Lutheran orthodoxy. In the recent Thirty Years’ War and its aftermath, the churches were heavily influenced by local princes. Even the clergy “do not really understand and practice true Christianity.”\(^{314}\) Spener’s skepticism towards Lutheran hierarchy, bolstered by the infiltration of civil magistrates, formal ceremonies, and emphasis on orthodox dogma, led him to protest that another form of papal absolutism had developed.\(^{315}\) Luther’s *Preface to Romans* inspired Spener to insist that justification and rebirth need to be experienced, not just believed; orthodoxy is a matter of the heart ultimately. For Spener, it was insufficient to know only how to “give answer to the errors of the papists, the Reformed, the Anabaptists,” or to be in “doctrinal agreement” with external orthodoxy. A true student of Scripture will be carried on “by

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\(^{312}\) Arndt, *True Christianity*, preface, 46.

\(^{313}\) Lutheran Spener signals a growing Protestant shift towards pietistic interpretations of Scripture relevant to this dissertation. However, Pietism within Calvinistic movements was also significant. For example, the Puritans in England would later influence the future of American evangelicalism. Unfortunately, this dissertation cannot extend itself to cover Pietism within Calvinism.


the practice of piety.”316 One of Spener’s primary methods for reforming the churches was a “more extensive”317 use of the Bible by individuals. The Scriptures contain rich minerals that can only be mined by pious individual diligence.318 The Scriptures are plain enough, but the illuminating light of the Spirit in the life of holiness is needed to interpret them.

For Spener, the Lutheran Church was the best example of what a visible church should be, but it had defects. Spener taught that the true invisible church included individual Christians of various creeds, even Roman Catholics.319 Churches, therefore, needed to be devotional assemblies with the purpose of inculcating glory to God and personal piety. Spener encouraged congregants to regularly meet in smaller, house gatherings for Bible study. These smaller groups broke through the political encumbrances of rigid church life, and provided direct access to the Bible. Spener’s eccesiola in ecclesia was a conventional way to describe piety as the practical function of a church engendered at a local, intimate level. He affirmed the need for broader visible structure to Christ’s Church, but emphasized what he perceived to be the practical need for small groups. Spener warned against the “monopoly of the clergy” and their prohibition of the laity to rigorously study the Bible. In response, he called for “diligent exercise of the spiritual priesthood.” Every Christian, Spener argued, needs to “offer himself” industriously to study the Bible, and with the “grace that is given him to teach

316 Spener, Pia Desideria, 49–50.
317 Spener, Pia Desideria, 87–89.
319 Stein, “Philipp Jakob Spener” in The Pietist Theologians, 86.
others." In general, beyond Spener, Pietism emphasized the need for an individual to have the Spirit to understand Scripture. A grasp of history and grammar, often lacking in the “spiritual priesthood,” was not always necessary, for a right interpretation could come as unction from heaven.

Pietism affected the interpretation of Scripture significantly because it provided a new hermeneutic. Rigid dogmatism may have subjected exegetical results to its prescribed orthodoxy, but Pietism subjected the very methods of exegesis to new standards. The inner motion of the soul influenced how one read the Scripture. Pietistic hermeneutics were at once individual and interior in their focus. Pietists were not always as “wedded” to the grammar of the text as their confessional opponents, but the Bible remained the source of their spirituality. Although Spener and others professed fidelity to the biblical text and Lutheran confessions, some sought to transcend texts in search of deeply personal interpretations. The spiritual force of the personal application of Scripture was so strong among some that the text’s meaning might transcend anything apparent in the particular passage. Pietism did more than elucidate the meaning of the grammar of the sacred text; it sought to expand and multiply it. In subsequent centuries, this approach to Scripture was to bear significant influence in America. To this reader, Spener’s emphasis on churches within a church diminished, possibly unintentionally, the value of a sacramental, universal Body, and encouraged local biblical interpretation.

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Pietism, rooted in Luther’s emphases on individual faith resulting in a transformed life, influenced the Enlightenment in distinct ways; four of them are listed here. First, Pietism inspired a continued skepticism towards religious orthodoxy. Over time, it distinguished the Bible from orthodox doctrine, and sought to study the Scripture apart from the dogmatic tradition. Second, it eventually lent focus to the individual appropriation of religion without the aid of a structured Church. Third, it emphasized practicing the faith over theorizing about it; at times, praxis was preferred over logos. Practical ethics were later elevated over universal principles and dogmatic confession. Fourth, several of the influential leaders of the Enlightenment were from Pietistic families, including Kant and Schleiermacher.

The True Church

At the beginning of the Reformation, nearly all Protestants rejected any legitimacy to the succession of bishops within the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church was apostate and its whole clerical system corrupt; the Spirit had left them. The original long-standing assumption that the Catholic Church and its ordained bishops were the interpreters of Scripture had ended. However, a sincere effort to identify one’s own denomination with the true Church persisted throughout the first century of Protestantism.

The Reformation was initially a debate among Catholics; it was a summons from within the Church to reform itself. After leaving the Catholic Church, certain autonomous Christian faith communities sprung up that claimed the Bible, not Rome, was their final authority. However, despite their antipathy towards Rome, the first reformers were not ready to quickly dismiss the idea of a true Church. The ancient idea of one, holy, catholic,
apostolic church continued long after the start of the Reformation. Different groups made the claim that they were the true Church. In order to support such claims, apostolicity often needed to be redefined. Claims to being the true Church were generally based on a particular fellowship’s fidelity to the apostolic teaching of the Bible. Two marks of a true church were frequently highlighted: faithful preaching of the apostolic gospel and the correct celebration of sacraments. The Reformed churches added discipline of its members; the Anabaptists added suffering by its members.

Neither Luther nor Calvin wished to categorically dismiss a visible church with ordained clergy. However, because their concerns lay elsewhere, they did not occupy themselves with a wide-ranging ecclesiology. Instead, both laid emphasis on faith in the word of the gospel leading to salvation, as well as other doctrines that immediately addressed justification.

For Luther, the true Church was hidden, living in spirit and inaccessible light. It was buried under the errors and sin of the visible, sensible churches. Yet, Luther, unlike some later Protestants, distinguished between a hidden Church and an invisible Church. On one hand, the true Church was concealed; on the other hand, it maintained a relationship with the visible Church. It could not be restricted to a particular fellowship, but it “must appear in the world…otherwise it can never be found.”

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324 Luther’s ecclesiological writings were usually situational, and Calvin’s systematic treatment of the Church was placed near the end of his Institutes. Also, cf. Braaten’s elucidation of this point in The Catholicity of the Reformation, 53.


326 Noll, “Luther and True Church,” 83—here he is referencing Luther’s 1535 Lectures on Galatians.
true Church was hidden but manifested wherever the Word of God was faithfully proclaimed and sacraments rightly administered.\textsuperscript{327} The true Church was where “nothing” was preached “except the sure, pure, and one word of God. Where that is missing, we no longer have the Church, but the synagogue of the devil.” The Church who listens to the words of another gospel is like a wife who listens to another man’s voice in bed; “she is certainly a whore.”\textsuperscript{328}

Of all the Reformers, Calvin possibly had the highest view of the Church. The Church is the “Mother” of all Christians, and it is in her “bosom” that God is “pleased to gather his sons.” The true Church comprises all of the elect, including those who have died in faith. The Church is “visible,” although some members of that visible Church are “wild beasts” who will be expunged at the end of time.\textsuperscript{329} Although Calvin disliked the Roman “hierarchy,” he appreciated the historic governance within the Catholic Church as necessary, “connected with the maintenance of discipline.”\textsuperscript{330} However, he did not perceive the Catholic Church as essentially a divine structure. He claimed that one cannot conclude that the “ancient bishops” intended anything like the current Catholic Church.

Calvin claimed to look exclusively to the Scriptures to define a true Church. The Presbyterian form of government adopted by many Reformed Churches was considered by Calvin as the closest model of New Testament ecclesiology.\textsuperscript{331} He contended that the

\textsuperscript{327} Noll, “Luther and True Church,” 83.

\textsuperscript{328} Martin Luther, “Against Hanswurst” in vol. 41 of \textit{Luther’s Works} (trans. by Eric W. Gritsch), 217.


ancient form of ecclesial governance was “overthrown” by the “tyranny of the papacy.”\footnote{Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, vol. 2, 4:5:1, 1084.} The “monstrous abuses,” including simony, covetousness, immorality, and intervention of secular princes in the selection of bishops evidenced the failures of Rome’s system.\footnote{Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, vol. 2, 4:5:3–19, 1087–1102.} The true Monarch of the Church, Jesus Christ, and his moral commands, were neglected.\footnote{Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, vol. 2, 4:6:8, 1109.} Beyond Luther and Calvin, other Protestants including the Anabaptists struggled to identify the true Church.

A few years prior to Calvin’s death, the Reformed churches’ Belgic Confession\footnote{Published in 1561.} declared that there is “one single and catholic universal church,” the gathering of “true Christian believers.” This Church is “not confined, bound or limited to a certain place or certain persons. But it is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world.”\footnote{“The Belgic Confessions,” Article 27. Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics. http://www.reformed.org/.} The marks of this true Church are determined by Scripture: it “engages in the pure preaching of the gospel;” it makes use of the “pure administration of the sacraments;” it practices church discipline.\footnote{“Belgic Confession,” Article 29.} Beyond Luther and Calvin, other Protestants, including the Anabaptists, struggled to identify the true Church.

The Anabaptists appeared to have shifted emphasis from “apostolic” to “apostolicity.” They were not concerned with maintaining a tradition of rites and orders. Nor did they regard succession of bishops with any significance. Rather, some
Anabaptists attempted to create a pristine Church solely based on the New Testament text. The devoted Christian could discover plain principles in the Bible alone for organizing a Church. The world was ending soon, and the Lord was reestablishing his true Church. For some Anabaptist revolutionaries, true Christianity could be restored through establishing a theocracy by force. For the non-revolutionary types, the true Church was wherever rightly baptized believers were gathered. The Anabaptists’ *Schleitheim Confession*, adopted by the Swiss in 1527, confessed “one body of Christ, which is the church of God.” Members of the Church were united by their baptism.

Over subsequent centuries, the ongoing fragmentation of Protestants created less of an interest in identifying the true Church. If the Church was no longer needed to rightly interpret Scripture, then attention was required elsewhere. Over time, the least complicated way of addressing ecclesiology was to simply claim that the Church was invisible, comprised of genuine individual believers. Increasingly, an organized Church was seen as ancillary. It was not essential to the gospel or biblical interpretation.

The sixteenth-century Reformation gave rise to forms of Biblicism that fundamentally challenged the axiomatic relationship between Church and Bible. By rejecting the ordained Catholic episcopate, the Reformers and their successors ultimately set biblical theology over against Church and Tradition. Through philology, the center of

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339 For example, as seen in the Münster Rebellion of 1534–35.


biblical interpretation was found moving towards the university. The spiritualist response
to this movement also sought to establish itself in the text of the Bible apart from a
bishop-led Church. At various moments and in assorted degrees, the two emphases
collided. The effects of Biblicism may not have been apparent to the early Reformers, but
the outcome of this intellectual shift eventually contributed to the secularization of
biblical studies, the privatization of faith, and the fragmentation of Christian
congregations. A perennial opposition between Church and Scripture was promoted
which would later escalate within American evangelicalism. By the time American
evangelicals dealt with biblical modernity, Scripture commonly was set against not only
Church and Tradition, but heartfelt religion as well.

**Enlightenment Demystification**

Long standing assumptions regarding the positive relationship between Church
and Scripture changed during the Reformation. Nevertheless, an equally severe
modification advanced during the Enlightenment. Increasingly, the Scriptures were
analyzed without regard to traditional interpretations. In fact, exegetical analyses
influenced by faith were increasingly dismissed by some scholars. As the integrity of the
Bible was scrutinized, some Christians feared that immutable dogmatic truths were being
changed. Beyond that, the possibility of divine revelation was disputed, which
fundamentally jeopardized several Christian convictions. To some, not only had the
Church been shelved, but now the Bible and revelation were disputed; religious faith was
put aside as an obstacle to biblical exegesis.

It is essential for present day evangelicals to understand the Enlightenment’s
effect on some of their own hermeneutical models. A noticeable extension of the
Reformation took place in Protestant exegesis during the Enlightenment. On one hand, emphases on *sola scriptura* can be said to have benefitted understanding the text of Scripture through scholarly advances. On the other hand, the results of non-ecclesial biblical studies appeared to have jeopardized the credibility of external revelation and threatened traditional dogmatic faith.

Various commentators attempt to furnish an explanation of the break between faith and modernity related to the Enlightenment. David Bentley Hart, for example, argues that an ethos of nihilism became the dominant cultural value since the Enlightenment. Ultimately, Western culture rejected any idea of truth sourced beyond the individual or his world. When the individual was set free from subservience to creeds and “religious fantasy,” the locus of liberty was found in a person’s power of choice rather than the ends he chose. Hart sees the dominant nihilism of the Enlightenment as the inevitable consequence of Christianity “leaving” Western Europe. Once Christianity was removed from its central location of influence, nothing remained after the Enlightenment but “bare will.”

Brad Gregory points directly to the Reformation. He argues that modern open-ended pluralism began with the Reformation’s rejection of the Catholic Church. Gregory argues that the Reformers’ departure from Catholicism was mostly caused by reaction against perceived “faulty doctrines;” the corrupt leadership

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within the Catholic Church was only a secondary cause of the Reformation. In response to Rome’s illegitimate additions to Scripture, the Reformers’ teaching of *Sola Scriptura* called for adherence to a Bible separated from Christian Tradition. However, Protestants were unable to reach doctrinal accord via Scripture alone, leading many to look for an arbiter more certain than Scripture. For many, universal reason became a surer bet. The integrity of the Scriptures was severely disputed, and many became convinced that revealed religion was irrational and fueled by fear.\(^3\) To Gregory, confidence in a self-interpreting Bible failed to create doctrinal cohesion among Protestants; it produced hyper-pluralism and finally made belief relative. It has ended in “dismal failure.” Michael Buckley blames Christians in general for the original hostility between faith and the modern world. He argues that many within the Enlightenment were not fundamentally opposed to religion; the rise of Deism demonstrates a propensity towards religion in a new form, not its abandonment.\(^4\) In addition, barely a few relished the label of atheist prior to recent times; only a small number wanted to be identified as complete non-believers.\(^5\) Instead of flatly blaming the world for its own unbelief, Buckley argues that the Church, specifically the Catholic Church, was part of the problem. As an example, theologians presented the nature of Christ, but fell short of casting the “fundamental reality of Jesus embodied in human history.”\(^6\) The Church’s lack of emphasis on the

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\(^3\) Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 112–113.


\(^5\) Buckley, *Modern Atheism*, 27.

\(^6\) Buckley, *Modern Atheism*, 66.
mystagogy of experience was countered by Deism’s sensitivity to oneself and his surroundings.\textsuperscript{350} Natural religion provided new criteria which was consistent with the real world. It critiqued confessional religion, and its conclusions could be made without appeal to the Church. A number of people became convinced that natural religion had achieved superior religious expressions. Conversely, Christopher Hitchens saw the modern development of atheism since the Enlightenment as a “necessary” but “insufficient” stage in the development of the human species.\textsuperscript{351} The Age of Enlightenment helped expose “the man-made origins of faith and its reliance upon superstition.” “We are very fortunate” to have the thoughts of modern pioneers of intellectual liberation such as David Hume.\textsuperscript{352} However, the advances of the Enlightenment are the achievements of a child; the species has much further to develop prior to full emancipation.

Conversation continues over why revealed religion had such a shaky rapport with the modern world. This dissertation’s purpose is to simply display that a disruption occurred which affected biblical interpretation; it is hesitant to furnish a solitary reason for the complex rupture. However, the loss of ecclesiology is put forward to evangelicals in this work as part of the problem. To this reader, some Reformers had removed the lampstand of the Church “from its place,”\textsuperscript{353} and “put it under a basket;”\textsuperscript{354} now, the age-

\textsuperscript{350} Buckley, Modern Atheism, 37.


\textsuperscript{352} Hitchens, introduction to “Theological-Political Treatise” by Baruch Spinoza in Portable Atheist, 21.

\textsuperscript{353} Revelation 2:5.

\textsuperscript{354} Matthew 5:15.
old question, “Did God actually say?” was revived. Regardless of what created the assumption that faith no longer had much to say about biblical interpretation, its impact on hermeneutics is noticeable. The move away from the inspiration of the biblical text was a step further from Luther’s and other Reformers’ Biblicism. The challenges of the Enlightenment left many Christians trying to explain their world without recourse to divine governance. People were troubled with honest questions. What level of integrity existed in the sacred text, and was revelation even possible? The modern challenges were exacerbated by the fact that many of those who disputed Christianity’s cherished beliefs were from inside the community of faith. The enemy had infiltrated the camp!

Although multiple social, economic, and political realities contributed to the respective Catholic and Protestant struggles with interpreting Scripture in the light of modernity, two broad developments are noteworthy: developments in the natural sciences and related developments in epistemology. Progress within these two broad fields of knowledge appreciably influenced modern developments in biblical interpretation.

Scientific Analysis of the Text

Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon (1561–1626) exemplifies some of the intellectual advances occurring in the natural sciences around the time of the Enlightenment. He is important to this dissertation because several evangelicals throughout American history, up to the present day, have attempted to appropriate aspects of his scientific methods for biblical

355 Genesis 3:1.

356 “Around the time” is inserted because people do not agree on a start date for the Enlightenment. Nor are the precise dates the concern of this dissertation. Technically, Bacon could be placed immediately prior to the Enlightenment. Nonetheless, his work is representative of the general era.
exegesis. Although Bacon does not exemplify all scientific endeavors that were taking place, he does typify some of the most foundational and subsequently influential achievements of his time. A growing confidence that the world could be rationally analyzed apart from commonly held assumptions if one had the correct scientific tools was becoming evident. Bacon perceived that an epistemological shift was needed in order for the natural sciences to advance. In time, the “new” logic which he thought was needed for science was applied by others to different fields of study, such as scriptural interpretation.

Francis Bacon, in his *New Organon*, sought to get beyond Aristotelian logic, which was based on syllogisms and used inferential logic to draw its conclusions.\(^{357}\) Bacon sought to investigate the premises that the current Aristotelian science took for granted. He critiqued the “common logic” of his day as “harmful” and “not useful” because it attempted to solve problems without addressing its own “common notions.”\(^{358}\) Investigators into the truth of the world had hitherto made their discoveries fit nicely into collective presumptions, but had failed to investigate those notions and axioms themselves.\(^{359}\) Bacon identified four “illusions” in his day that “block men’s minds” and serve as idols. Idols of the Tribe are in human nature, which result in overstating observances. People extend their opinion about what they experience, thus distorting reality. Idols of the Cave are individual distortions of scientific data. The human mind is

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analogous to a cave with multiple roaming thoughts and temperaments. During the interpretation of data, people shade their findings according to their own dispositions. Idols of the Marketplace reflect the common usage of words without considering their meanings. The use of unreflective language distorts the data. Idols of the Theatre are false ideas that nonetheless are assumed by scholars and believed in by the masses. These are false paradigmatic structures that go unquestioned, yet govern popular conclusions. Bacon argued for a deliberate suspension of commonly held assumptions followed by a painstaking analysis of raw nature, and limiting conclusions to the results of inductive research.

After establishing how humanity can remove the clutter in its intellectual cave, Bacon sought to link his new epistemology to ethics and religion. Despite Bacon’s emphasis on inductive analysis, he was not opposed to revealed religion; he did not instruct his moral sage to disregard divine revelation. Instead, Bacon’s investigator needed to critically get behind the theological assumptions of the day, scientifically analyze the raw facts of revelation, and then inductively come to conclusions. In *New Atlantis*, Bacon’s utopian society was built upon those who were astutely “dedicated to study the works and creatures of God.” The noble society on the island was named “Salomon’s House” or the “College of the Six Days Works.” These names were given to

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signify the honorable purpose of “finding out the true nature of things, whereby God might have the more glory in the workmanship of them.”

Bacon’s inductive research significantly influenced others, including Isaac Newton. Akin to Bacon’s shift away from sapient understanding to useful knowledge, Newton accentuated the need to acutely study efficient causes, or how things worked, in order to understand an object. This was a significant shift of emphasis from analyzing final causes, or why things do what they do. Newton’s theory of universal gravitation and three laws of motion explained in lucid terms how the universe functioned. His system stimulated the Enlightenment’s conception of nature as an orderly domain governed by strict mathematical laws, and it bolstered optimism in human ability to ascertain those laws. However, neither did Newton deny the divine source of nature and its laws. He wrote several works of theology and believed that the Bible was a revelation from God. He was fascinated with biblical prophecy and is well known for predicting the end of the world in the twenty-first century. Although Bacon and Newton did not categorically ban the idea of God from the study of nature, other scientists did. In time, the growing emphasis on inductive scientific research affected biblical interpretation. The biblical text was studied on its own just as nature was analyzed. The modern era was removing the obstacles purportedly caused by institutional religion and giving direct access to religious texts. For some, scientific analysis of Scripture, apart from religious stimulus, became the primary way to ascertain the text’s meaning. Hans Frei notes that a noticeable rupture


between the biblical text and its presumed historic reference can be detected in the
seventeenth century, specifically in the work of Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza.\textsuperscript{364}

**Baruch Spinoza**

Although Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) was Jewish, he is important to this study on Christian exegesis of Scripture for two reasons. First, his ideas greatly influenced Christian biblical studies long after his works were published. Second, Spinoza provides an illustration of the increased emphasis on studying the text alone.

For Spinoza, not only was the synagogue and Church excluded from interpretive authority, but traditional faith itself needed to be muted before the text. Like the Protestants of his day, with whom he had acquaintance while living in Amsterdam, Spinoza taught that in order to “bear unprejudiced witness” to the contents of Scripture, one must limit himself to the biblical text. “Our knowledge of Scripture must then be looked for in Scripture only.”\textsuperscript{365} No other principles or data can be utilized to understand Scripture other than its own. In order to accomplish such a competent survey, the exegete must place the text and its author within their proper historical horizons. This included a thorough knowledge of the original languages in which the Scriptures were written and their authors spoke, an analysis of each text and the arrangement of its contents, and the environment of the author. The milieu of the author included his identity, the occasion for

\textsuperscript{364} Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 42. In addition, Legaspi notes the “death of Scripture” as a “historic shift” occurring near the time of the Enlightenment. He distinguishes between the scriptural Bible and the academic Bible, which he claims was forged during the Enlightenment; after the Enlightenment, the Bible was increasingly viewed as a text to be analyzed, not a Scripture to be confessed. Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10–12, 169.

writing, his audience, and how each book came to be accepted as sacred.\textsuperscript{366} Spinoza laid out principles of biblical exegesis that would be fine-tuned over the next two centuries. His focus on text alone allowed him to detect internal inconsistencies, identify redactions, and raise questions of authorship. His antipathy towards intolerant religious institutions, whether Jewish or Christian, allowed him the freedom to gather empirical data from the text, not from religious claims he thought were superimposed on the text.

Spinoza considered his hermeneutic to be analogous to scientific investigations of the world. “The method of interpreting Scripture does not widely differ from the method of interpreting Nature—in fact, it is almost the same.”\textsuperscript{367} Spinoza argued that nature operated within an orderly, inviolable course as a necessary result of God’s attributes. Scripture was a product of nature, and needed to be studied in the same fashion as the natural world. Faith-based presumptions, derived from dogmatic assertions, needed to be discarded. Spinoza’s hermeneutic was circular to a degree.\textsuperscript{368} The parts of the biblical text were analyzed on a micro level in order to get to an image of the whole; then, the larger whole was studied to better understand the parts. The understanding of one conditioned the knowledge of the other. If the meaning of a passage was difficult to grasp, then history and grammar were employed for assistance. Spinoza’s method, aspects of which are present in contemporary evangelicalism, further elevated the role of history and grammar in biblical exegesis.


For Spinoza, Scripture was not a unique revelation, and a religious assembly was not needed to discern its contents. Spinoza asserted that the message of Christian and Jewish Scriptures was universal and not dependent on the text; it was discoverable outside of the Bible. Actually, the Bible was written to show people that they do not need a Bible; they could autonomously get at the content of the message of Scripture, the Golden Rule, by investigating their own natures. He based his assertion on an analogy of the human being. The Scriptures were a product of human nature. Therefore, God’s “Divine Law” was “universal and common to all” because it issued from “universal human nature.”369 The knowledge of God’s nature, his provision for creatures, and “true moral doctrines,”370 specifically the Golden Rule, were discoverable without a biblical text. “The highest power of Scriptural interpretation belongs to every man;”371 therefore, the message of Scripture does not require ecclesiastical warrant; it “can be easily understood in any language.”372

For Spinoza, the Scriptures were unreasonably revered by religious leaders who wanted to control others. They compelled others to think as they did “under the guise of religion.”373 These men only wanted to “hawk their commentaries,” but were afraid of being shown their own exegetical errors. Both the churches and the synagogues

370 Spinoza, “Theo-Politico Treatise” in Chief Works, 100, 104.
373 Spinoza, “Theo-Politico Treatise” in Chief Works, 98.
misunderstood the nature of Scripture. The essence of true religion was to love God and neighbor; all else was superfluous.

Spinoza’s separation between the literal text and its actual meaning was possibly more severe than found among his Protestant acquaintances. For Spinoza, Scripture does not explain things by their “natural causes,” but it narrates what appeals to the human imagination, especially in the unlearned. The Scriptures aim to excite wonder, and eventually lead people to the devotion of loving God and neighbor. For Spinoza, it can be said that revelation was a good imagination; revelation was not God demonstrating what was previously unknowable. Whatever is referred to as miraculous in Scripture is written so to stir human passions towards piety, not to relay dogma. Regardless of the miraculous claims in a text, what occurred, only “happened naturally.” The real subject matter of the narratives, for Spinoza, was not the events they narrated, but the religious lessons they conveyed. And those lessons were separable from the text! The meaning of Scripture did not lie in historic truth because history was impotent to “give us the knowledge and love of God.” After noting internal anomalies within the Pentateuch, Spinoza claimed it could not have been written by Moses. The preface to Deuteronomy, for example, was written by someone who crossed the Jordan, which Moses never did. Phrases such as, “And Moses wrote,” or “And Moses died,” could not have been written by the referent. Genesis 22:14 refers to Moriah as “the mount of the LORD;” yet, it did

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376 Frei, Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, 43–44.
not receive that appellation until after Solomon’s Temple. Spinoza was expelled from his local Synagogue, and it is generally suspected that his exegetical conclusions were partially responsible.

After Spinoza, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the divide between the subject matter of the sacred text and the narrative itself would become even more pronounced. A developing tradition was budding, which “combined liberation from biblical orthodoxy with a lively sense for the Bible as a valuable source of religious insight.” A new, fresh approach to Scripture was developing. Some thought that it offered opportunities to support traditional dogma. Others were quite contrary in their conclusions.

**Hermann Samuel Reimarus**

As the sciences of literary criticism were developing, Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) provided one of the more scathing criticisms of Christian Scripture. After Reimarus’ death, Gotthold Lessing published *Fragmentenstreit*; others followed with additional posthumous fragments, which showed that Reimarus had distanced himself from even the most liberal scholarship of his day. Significantly, some of the working assumptions of Reimarus were also held by his traditional opponents; on all sides of the debate, ecclesiastical interpretations were given little warrant.

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Reimarus demonstrates a shift towards an increased critical analysis of the biblical text, and devaluation of claims of revelation. Reimarus taught that people should not rely on revealed religion. For Reimarus, a person could gain sufficient knowledge of God and data for ethical living by studying nature. Scripture was not needed. In fact, Scripture contained fraud. Reimarus did acknowledge that Jesus “referred men to the true and great purpose of any religion …an eternal blessedness;” however, for Reimarus, these references only conveyed part of the gospel story. Reimarus emphatically denied that Jesus came to teach any new mysteries or articles of faith. Like any religious teacher, Jesus’ “intention” was “directed toward a change of mind, toward sincere love of God and the neighbor.” Jesus’ objectives did not include worship of himself as the Son of God or a claim of being the cause of spiritual salvation.

It is noteworthy that Reimarus claimed to base his negative conclusions about the Scriptures almost exclusively on the Scriptures and their surrounding history. Reimarus’ method was to study the Bible using the Bible. By centralizing the text of the Bible in his critique, Reimarus demonstrated a negative offshoot of the Reformers’ sola scriptura. For example, in order to argue that Jesus was not unique, Reimarus noted that many people in the Scriptures who were deemed close to God were similarly called Son, such as Solomon. Reimarus analyzed the temptation of Christ, where Satan says, “If you are the Son of God…,” and demonstrated that the conditional structure of the sentence

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suggested the term Son was not unique to Jesus. Reimarus returned to the Pentateuch and Psalms from where Jesus responded to Satan, and demonstrated how “sons” are simply those loved by God, and nothing more; they were the ones God feeds, protects, and warns. The doctrine of Jesus as divine Son, given in the New Testament, represented the “new doctrine,” or “doctrinal reconstruction” of the Apostles. \(^{385}\) In other words, the apostles deceived their readers. Paul, too, was in on the deception.

Reimarus’ method of “reading the gospels by itself”\(^ {386}\) informed him that Jesus never spoke of a suffering savior. History, Reimarus argued, shows no proof that early Jews expected anything but a secular deliverance. Jesus, therefore, never intended to bring a spiritual salvation, and especially not one through suffering; salvation based on a suffering savior was never in Jesus’ mind. Otherwise, the disciples would not have been shocked at the death and resurrection of Christ. Instead, the shouts of Hosanna show that Jesus expected a secular salvation, a hope which was disappointed in the end. Jesus had miscalculated his opportunity, and he also suffered from the demise of the Baptist, whose support was desperately needed in the end. \(^{387}\) The entire traditional message of a suffering Savior, who is resurrected from the dead, and will return a second time, was categorically “invented and false.”\(^ {388}\) Again, Reimarus appeals to the text alone to make his point. He notices that Matthew’s account of the guards is neglected by the other three gospels, the various gospel accounts differ at key points, and the New Testament’s


\(^{386}\) Reimarus, *Goal of Jesus*, 1:32, 81–82.


\(^{388}\) Reimarus, *Goal of Jesus*, 2:36, 104.
exegesis of the Old is invalid because it inserts meaning into the Old which was not meant to be taken as prophecy.

Reimarus’ treatment of miracles anticipates later critical study in the pursuit of the real historical Jesus. For Reimarus, none of the miracles explain away the dubious fraud of the Apostles, or their poor exegesis of the Old Testament. Rather, “experienced” literary readers should “easily understand” that the miraculous stories covered up “their pretended honesty and piety.”

The Apostles’ fabricated stories are intentionally ambiguous and meant to distract from what’s really going on. They are indications of falsehood, and are ultimately “useless” at getting at the real story. For this reason, an astute student of the historical Jesus will necessarily dismiss accounts of miracles as reliable informants.

Reimarus’ views were contradictory and even shocking to most scholarship of the day. He suggested deliberate dishonesty, not just in the current ecclesiastical leaders in Germany, but in the Apostles themselves. However, he claimed to restrict his research to the Scripture and its immediate history. His works, several of which were published posthumously by Lessing, created a torrent in critical biblical studies that persists to the present.

Reimarus’ works received sharp rebuke from many eighteenth-century scholars, including Johann Salomo Semler. However, Semler, in his rebuttal of Reimarus, employed similar methods as his opponent. Semler argued from the Scripture and reason

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389 Reimarus, Goal of Jesus, 2:52, 122–123.

390 Cf. Reimarus, Fragments, and Chadwick’s introduction to Lessing’s Theological Writings, 9–11.
that the Apostles correctly perceived prophetic messages in Old Testament passages. From the teachings of Jesus, it was clear that Jesus spoke of a spiritual salvation. He also attacked Reimarus for his poor history, arguing that Jewish Rabbi’s indeed hoped for a spiritual salvation from the Messiah.391

Both the methods of Reimarus and his opponents exhibit developing assumptions regarding biblical interpretation: attention must primarily be given to the text itself; one must become familiar with the grammar and history behind the text; the true meaning of the text might lie separately behind the text; the veracity of the text cannot be assumed but must prove itself; accounts of miracles might be cause of suspicion, but never elucidation of revelation; the traditional teachers of Christianity may have missed, or hid, the point that the ultimate purpose of the Bible is ethical, not dogmatic. Even more traditional interpreters, like Semler, similarly gave greater attention to the bare text of the Bible. This approach often left the Church outside of the exegetical conversation.

David Friedrich Strauss

When David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874) wrote Das Leben Jesu in 1835, it represented an epochal “crisis in theology at which doubts and critical objections of centuries as to the credibility of the Bible narratives” had swept away all “orthodox apologetics” with “destructive” force.392 The “critical process” culminating in Strauss’s text was “latent from the beginning in the lifeblood of Protestantism.” The purification process to which the Reformers long before subjected the Catholic Church was now

being applied to the biblical text. Specifically, the doctrine of inspiration had “restrained” critical research of Scripture up until this interval. However, by the time of Strauss several other scholars were already expressing doubts over the integrity of the Bible. The significance of Strauss’s work was the “thoroughness” with which he critically addressed “every section” of the gospels. In his attempt at purification, he left nothing untouched. Strauss raised questions in his critical work that he perceived were inevitable and necessary. He sought to expose the mythical origins of Christianity, something he was convinced had largely been ignored.

Strauss entered the tension between two groups and provided “a new mode of considering the life of Jesus.” On one hand, “naturalists” critiqued the Bible by emphasizing the errors of biblical authors. Miracles were a violation of natural laws; biblical accounts containing the miraculous should be discarded. Deists and other rationalists interpreted the Scripture with the assumption that the essential meaning of the text was sourced in reason. The exegete must extract the moral lesson from each story; he should not concern himself with faith in the miraculous or the dogmatic claims of the text. Often, naturalistic explanations were available behind supposed supernatural occurrences. Strauss applauded the rationalists’ rejection of miracles, but chided them for “tenaciously” holding onto the history of the accounts. Their critique did not go deep

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393 Pleiderer, introduction to Strauss’ *Life of Jesus*, vii.

394 Pleiderer, introduction to Strauss’ *Life of Jesus*, xii.

395 Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 39. For Strauss, Any religion resting on written records will eventually experience discrepancy between the old sacred literary history and the advanced thinking of its modern adherents.

396 Strauss, preface to first edition of *Life of Jesus*, xxix.

397 Ibid.
enough. On the other hand, the “supernaturalists” asserted the literal and historical truthfulness of every story in the Bible, and they expressed little regard for natural laws or real history. They were closed-minded, which opened them to exaggeration. They responded to the naturalists by insisting that some elements of the faith were given; some aspects of the Christian faith needed to be accepted as lying beyond human reason. Strauss reproached the supernaturalists because of their uncritical analysis of the Bible. Their “exaggerated spirit” was seeking to restore pristine faith “by the aid of a mystical philosophy.”

Strauss’s response to the tension between naturalists and supernaturalists was a new hermeneutic which functioned in a Hegelian structure of thought, and served as a mythical interpretation of the gospels. The real Jesus of history needed to be extracted from the mythical Christ of faith. Myth, for Strauss, was the presentation of an imaginative event in historical terms. For Strauss, the miracles of Scripture never occurred, and neither did some of the history. Instead, they were constructive responses by a community to its particular needs. While Strauss refused to claim that the entire gospel was a myth, he did argue that the entire gospel had mythical elements. In Das Leben Jesu, Strauss sought to subject the entire gospel narrative to critical examination in order to disentangle the real Jesus of history.

For Strauss, Christianity and Judaism had central elements which were common to all faiths; it was in the particulars that they differed, and the myths were located in

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398 Strauss, preface to first edition of Life of Jesus, xxix.
those particulars.\textsuperscript{399} A narrative could be identified as mythical if the “narration is irreconcilable with known and universal laws,” or it is inconsistent with itself or related narratives.\textsuperscript{400} Strauss knew that the “assertion that the Bible contains myth … is directly opposed to the convictions of the believing Christian.”\textsuperscript{401} However, he claimed that contemporary opposition to his mythical exegesis of Scripture was unnecessary; defiance simply revealed “the limitation of the individual to that form of belief in which he has been educated.”\textsuperscript{402} Not only did the miraculous stories in the gospels never actually occur, but Jesus was not truly divine. The early Church, even Jesus himself, incorporated Jewish messianic ideas to imaginatively create the impression of a divine savior. Strauss’s conclusions unsettled many. Unchanging dogma was being jeopardized!

In his work, Strauss employed a Hegelian dialectical method to get to his exegetical conclusions. He examined each biblical pericope in great detail, and then expounded traditional ways of interpreting the biblical text, often first giving the views of supernaturalists. He then rejoined with the rational explanation of the pericope, listing its several supporters and their natural law arguments. He pit one view against another, and then sought to resolve the tension with his third way, a mythical interpretative synthesis. His exegesis of Luke’s account of the Angel Gabriel announcing the coming birth of the Baptist provides an example of his method. First, Strauss reminded his readers of the miraculous appearance of Gabriel to old Zacharias, the angel’s prophetic declaration, and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{399} Strauss, \textit{Life of Jesus}, 80.
  \item \textsuperscript{400} Strauss, \textit{Life of Jesus}, 88–89.
  \item \textsuperscript{401} Strauss, \textit{Life of Jesus}, 69.
  \item \textsuperscript{402} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Zacharias’s unbelief and subsequent judgment of lost speech. Strauss cited several problematic questions scholars had raised about the pericope’s supernatural claims, including external and internal inconsistencies with the story. Second, Strauss provided common rationalistic explanations of the account that fit into natural laws. To Strauss, rationalists only “retain two leading facts: the apparition and the dumbness.” The miraculous apparition is explained by rationalists as another person arriving unexpectedly in a poorly lit dusty room of the Temple. The temporal dumbness was due to Zacharias’s frail age and the shock of seeing an apparition. Third, Strauss critiques these and several other conjectures about what really happened. In presenting his mythical view, Strauss rejects the entire history of the annunciation; the only “positive matter of fact” in the account is the “impression made by John the Baptist, by virtue of his ministry and his relation to Jesus.”

The adult Baptist impacted the lives of people so profoundly that his admirers, in line with classic myth-makers, went back and created imaginative tales about his birth. Strauss comprehensively continues this dialectical reasoning throughout the entire gospel story. His most unsettling proposition was that Jesus was not divine.

For Strauss, the accounts of miracles in Jesus’ ministry were not historical, but they satisfied Jewish expectations of the coming Messiah. The term Son of God was interchangeable with Son of Man and Christ; it was a term that pagans often used when describing their great heroes. Christians had imaginatively turned it into a unique

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404 Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 100.
appellation of Jesus. The author of John’s Gospel displays inconsistency with the Synoptic authors by reserving the term for a reference to deity. John’s author is also inconsistent with himself by suggesting a distinction of terms that were always synonymous. John’s imagination helped create the divine reference in the term.\textsuperscript{407} Strauss detects the mythical nature of the resurrection of Jesus by the inconsistencies between the gospels regarding who went to the tomb and when, what was spoken at the tomb, and the disappearance and reappearance of the angels.\textsuperscript{408} The stories were not harmonious as supernaturalists claimed. Neither were the multiple attempts of rationalists to explain what really happened according to natural law. Strauss reckoned it “correct discernment” by his exegete to reject the historicity of the narrative, and “recognize the forms of popular Jewish conceptions by which the primitive Christian tradition held it necessary to glorify the resurrection of its Messiah; a recognition which at once solves in the most simple manner the differences.”\textsuperscript{409} Christian imagination, sourced in the influence of Jesus and Jewish expectations for a Messiah, had created the myth of Jesus’ resurrection.

Strauss’s attempt to distinguish real history from mythical narrative is seen in his apology for Reimarus. Reflecting on eighteenth-century biblical scholarship, Strauss argued that while Reimarus and others were admirably critical towards Christianity, they were overly harsh in their criticisms. Further, they themselves assumed the historicity of biblical accounts; they did not sufficiently diagnose their own assumptions or the possibility of mythical constructions. On one hand, they had rightly spotted specific

\textsuperscript{407} Strauss, \textit{Life of Jesus}, 288–291.

\textsuperscript{408} Strauss, \textit{Life of Jesus}, 709–710.

\textsuperscript{409} Strauss, \textit{Life of Jesus}, 718.
“prejudices” which unjustly favored Christianity and wrongly ruled mankind for centuries.⁴¹⁰ They correctly identified false assumptions which the churches demanded the faithful to accept. On the other hand, they were still beholden to the presupposition that history could not be extracted from the narrative. For Reimarus, if a story contained a miracle, such as the Law given at Sinai, then it needed to be either accepted or rejected in one piece; the miracle could not be separated from the history. This led Reimarus and other eighteenth scholars to severely degrade Christianity and claim it was built on deception.⁴¹¹ Strauss sought a more “conciliatory” explanation. Christianity was not a divine revelation as the churches claimed, but neither was it simply deception. Moses was not a miracle worker, but neither was he a charlatan.⁴¹² Strauss used his own understanding of myth as a hermeneutical tool to resolve the tension.

Although Strauss’s dialectical work is considered quite flawed by some modern standards of biblical criticism, the historical significance of his work is noteworthy for evangelicals. In his writings, Strauss captured the “spirit” of his age, the “purifying influence” of biblical analysis.⁴¹³ Using grammar, history, and Hegelian philosophy, he refuted the traditional interpretations of Scripture. He complimented rationalists for their rejection of divine revelation and their attempts to purify biblical interpretation; but, he also repudiated them for not going far enough. For Strauss, the history of the entire Bible was largely false, and needed to be explained in a new way. In Strauss, it can be seen that

⁴¹⁰ David Friedrich Strauss, “Hermann Samuel Reimarus and His Apology” in Reimarus: Fragments, 47.


⁴¹³ Pleiderer, introduction to Strauss’ Life of Jesus, v.
the purification process begun in the Reformation had moved beyond the Church to the Bible.

It appears to this reader that several biblical exegetes followed a trajectory which had been partially set in motion by the Reformers. During the Reformation, some concluded that apparent corruptions in the Catholic Church completely antiquated an ecclesial reading of Scripture. Around the time of the Enlightenment, advanced literary skills led others to suggest the Bible itself had elements that were “invented and false.” These vociferous critics became obvious targets for the orthodox, but the orthodox often used the same approach of *sola scriptura* to combat their opponents.

Ironically, Protestants’ intense focus on the text alone appears to have restricted their resources. The Reformers’ disdain for ecclesial influence had long kept the Catholic Church outside of the game. Then, scholars circumvented interpretations governed by faith. In time, particular biblical studies even discounted the text itself. In light of this trajectory of contraction, modern evangelicals should give serious consideration to the limits of studying the text alone. Further, they should consider the possibility that an ecclesial exegesis can be intellectually rigorous, and actually open up the full sense of Scripture.

**Epistemological Developments**

In addition to developments in literary analysis, progress in human epistemology affected biblical hermeneutics. Honest epistemological questions shook up dogmatism in both philosophy and religion. The relationship between faith, knowledge, and the modern world needed to be revisited and refined. If one takes Descartes’ *Meditations* literally, he learns that the mathematician locked himself in a room for the purpose of meditating on
existence. His object was to discover an absolutely reliable foundation of knowledge to refute radical skepticism. Descartes was dissatisfied with the scholastic idea that the truthfulness of a proposition was based on sensation. For Descartes, the human senses were liable to being deceived. He replaced the uncertain basis of sense knowledge with the clear and certain knowledge derived from ideas. Although several critiqued Descartes, he helped progress a candid attempt to establish certitude apart from the purported dubious system of arid, traditional scholasticism. After Descartes, many thinkers began to wonder if faith and revelation even had a meaningful place in the processes of human understanding. By the end of the eighteenth century, the point of tension had long since moved away from debating if the Catholic Church was still the guardian of the truth of the gospel, or even if the Bible was the sole authority of the divine voice. Increasing focus was directed towards the human capacity to perceive divine verities at all. 414

Following are three brief examples of epistemological developments during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that significantly influenced biblical hermeneutics: rational Deism, the empirical skepticism of Hume, and the attempted synthesis of Kant. These three illustrations do not capture all the philosophical developments of the era and may neglect equally important advances; however, they sufficiently demonstrate the growing assumption that a severe rift existed between faith and human cognition.

414 Cf. Peter Markie, “Rationalism vs. Empiricism,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Summer 2013, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/rationalism-empiricism/. Often, the terms “rationalism” or “empiricism” are used to explain different ways people try to interpret the world. However, these labels need to be loosely applied. Some of the authors did not view themselves in such a strict manner. Rationalists certainly used their senses, and empiricists used reason. Nonetheless, the descriptors will be maintained in this dissertation because they are helpful for identifying respective emphases.
Significant voices challenged the assumption that the human mind could receive divine revelation. This appeared to jeopardize orthodox Christianity’s foundation. The predicament for the Christian faithful was worsened by the fact that several constructors of the new epistemologies were from within the Christian fold. More than a few of the leading Enlightenment thinkers were from Protestant homes.

**Rational Deism**

The supposed universal nature of reason made it appealing as an ultimate criterion of religious truth claims. Reason was protected from sensory distortion, thus making its conclusions reliable. It was both the source of knowledge and a litmus test for religious claims. For the Christian rationalist, reason was a gift from the Creator and ultimately could not contradict the revelation of God. Although some Christian rationalists may have believed in miracles and prophetic revelation, as well as other truths beyond reason, those divine events were not considered conclusive in themselves. It was reason that finally verified truth to the human mind. A broad spectrum of people, from confessing Christians to near atheists, utilized rational Deism. Deists believed in the existence of a supreme divinity, one creator God, but rejected Trinitarian faith. They restricted their knowledge of God to what human reasoning determined. The natural world was likened to a complex watch, and order in the universe posited God as a watchmaker. However, the specific description of that watchmaker was not readily available.

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Critical differences between Deism and traditional Christianity surface at this point. Deism posits a Creator God, but not a sustaining deity. God created a world which operated according to natural laws, but then ceased involvement in that world. They rejected claims made by Church, Tradition, and Scripture which were supposedly above reason. This meant that Deists rejected Christian Trinitarian and soteriological dogmas. In regards to exegesis of Scripture, this meant that one could not suppose that God was active in a Church, or that revelation was safeguarded through divine offices. The constraints of Deism also affected the possibilities of worship. God was to be worshipped by ethical living, not dogmatic praise and confession. God gave humans the capacity to discern reality, but not an obligation to confess unverifiable formulations. To the Deist, natural laws obviously controlled the universe, and doctrinal concerns needed to be replaced with a focus on ethical and social issues.\(^{416}\) Little else could be verified rationally.

A seminal Deist text was John Toland’s *Christianity: Not Mysterious*, wherein he contended that religion must “necessarily be reasonable and intelligible.”\(^{417}\) Although Toland (1670–1722) personally held to several traditional Christian confessions, something his heirs often departed from, he still saw human reason as providing the essential support for the Christian religion. Revelation was valuable, not as “a

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\(^{417}\) John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious: or, a Treatise Shewing, That There Is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, nor Above It; and That No Christian Doctrine Can Be Properly Call’d a Mystery* (London: 1702; PDF ebook), xxvii. Note: Toland’s older English spellings are modified in the quotes inserted in this dissertation.
necessitating motive of assent,” but as an informant of truth. For Toland, claims of spiritual realities still needed rational “evidence” in order to be believed.\textsuperscript{418} Any defense of revelation must be entirely understandable and clear, and any appeal to mystery had to be rejected because it suggested unintelligibility. Nothing was mysterious; even those things not yet understood still contained factual information. The gospel, God, his attributes, and eternity were not enigmatic; people were simply ignorant of the essences of those objects.\textsuperscript{419} The emphasis on rational clarity within Deism helped raise fundamental questions regarding revelation. Was it intelligible to suggest a good God would abandon humanity for so long until the time of Christ? Was it reasonable to posit that only a few select folk received special understanding of truth? The quest for facticity led others to doubt the credibility of not only Christianity, but any religion that claimed to be based on the miraculous. Numerous Deists were motivated by skeptics, such as Hume, to cleanse Christianity of its dogmatic confessions; they concluded that Christian dogma was “the height of unreason.”\textsuperscript{420}

In their attempts to attain accurate understanding of reality, Deists appear to have limited their field of knowledge. To this reader, they unnecessarily shied away from, and even misunderstood, Christian mystery. For the medieval Christian, mystery was often seen as intelligible; it was knowable, but it was an infinite comprehension. For Aquinas, as an example, God was not fully comprehensible; however, the human mind could come

\textsuperscript{418} Toland, \textit{Christianity Not Mysterious}, 37–38.

\textsuperscript{419} Toland, \textit{Christianity Not Mysterious}, 81.

\textsuperscript{420} George M. Marsden, \textit{The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 114.
to some limited understanding of God by way of analogy.\textsuperscript{421} Christian elucidation of revelation was knowledge of an infinite object. Conversely, Deists denied the possibility of knowledge gained by revelation.

The popularity of Deism is important to evangelicals for its location in the trajectory of biblical interpretation. It shows yet another feature in the development of biblical exegesis since the Reformation. The Reformation challenged the authority of the Catholic Church to interpret the Scriptures; the Radical Reformers and Pietists challenged the authority of the Lutheran Church to interpret the Scriptures; particular spiritualists posited an antithesis between Word and Spirit; literary critics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries challenged the reliability of Scripture; rational Deists challenged the basic idea of revelation.

**Hume’s Skepticism**

Skepticism developed as a response to rationalists and empiricists.\textsuperscript{422} Distinct from some rationalists, empiricists attempted to test claims to knowledge through analysis of sense data. They generally rejected all sorts of innate knowledge or information supposedly gained by intuition. Empiricists concluded that the human mind does not have the capability to discover the nature of the universe by pure reasoning. John Locke (1632–1704) specifically argued that human knowledge is restricted to ideas, but ideas that are generated by human experience; there are no innate ideas.\textsuperscript{423} Locke

\textsuperscript{421} Cf., especially, Aquinas’s thirteen articles under the twelfth question of his *Summa*, Part I.

\textsuperscript{422} As mentioned in note #414 above, the labels “rationalists” and “empiricists” are used here with caution.

argued that when knowledge of an object was not possible, one could “achieve probability on the basis of experience.”424 For Locke, even internal reflection is empirical. Locke argued that religious people rightly have recourse to faith after analysis has gone as far as possible. The believer accepts the proposition, which reason cannot confirm, based on the “credit of the Proposer.”425 When propositions of faith cannot be verified, the human mind is justified believing them based on the experience of the trustworthiness of the one giving the revelation. Here, the skeptics objected.

David Hume (1711–1776) argued that Locke’s probability thesis was untenable. He claimed that neither reason nor experience provided a basis for certainty. For Hume, humans have certainty of nothing, and must rely on instinct or habit.426 A person who observes the contact of billiard balls cannot claim to know what really happened. His perception of the experience is all that he has. “The mind can never possibly find the effect in the supposed cause.” “It must invent or imagine some event, which it ascribes to the object as its effect; and it is plain that this invention must be entirely arbitrary.”427

Hume argued that although experience is “our only guide in reasoning concerning matters

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426 Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springstead, introduction to “David Hume” in Primary Readings in Philosophy, 153.

of fact,” that our senses are not “infallible.” Human senses convey impressions, not true understanding. For Hume, people rightly observe motions, but they unjustly assume a law of Cause and Effect. Hume restricted what was accepted to be knowledge. Humans only know sensations, not the supposed corresponding realities beyond those sensations. Hume’s critique of human knowledge threatened the possibility of any science which worked under assumed principles.

In regards to the Christian faith, Hume undermined the credibility of authoritative claims of truth. People could not know if any of their religious experiences were valid. All they could testify to was that they possessed sensations. And they certainly could not verify if experiences from a bygone era were reliable. The Bible could not be reckoned as reliable because it made truth claims based on the ancient, unproven testimonies of others. Hume specifically discounted any confidence in a religious tradition, such as Christianity, being established on miracles. This was because a supposed miracle cannot be verified even if it was witnessed first-hand; only one’s perception could be verified. Worse, for Hume, was to trust someone else’s supposed experience with miracles. For Hume, human testimony of the miraculous was unreliable for multiple reasons. First, insufficient testimony exists for miracles; they generally occur in obscure locations with few witnesses. Second, people are dishonest and exaggerate the truth of their perceptions. Third, claims of miracles usually occur among uneducated barbarians who know little about reality at all. Fourth, all claims of miracles are challenged by someone; no claim is undisputed. Every traditional assertion can be countered by another tradition, “resulting

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in the mutual destruction of belief and authority.” The fact that the supposed miracles of Christianity happened centuries ago made it impossible to accept them. For Hume, religious tradition was unreliable and only an ignorant person believed it.

**Kantian Critique**

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was deeply disturbed by Hume’s skeptical arguments. His anxiety was two-fold. He agreed with Hume that rationalism could lead to unfounded dogmatism; however, he saw Hume’s skepticism as threatening the legitimacy of all science and religion. If empirical science could not justify its own existence, and was limited in doing so to its own data, then human understanding, whether scientific, ethical, or religious would not be possible. In his epistemology, Kant sought to make room for both science and religion.

Kant argued that both experience and reason were needed for human knowledge. He corrected rationalists for thinking their reason could surpass its own limits and speak about things they could not know. The topic of supernatural verities is a “realm” where “all use of reason ceases.” Some objects of knowledge, such as God, immortality, and human free will, go beyond sensory awareness; they cannot be known in themselves. However, Kant also corrected the empiricist by arguing that human reason was needed to process all sensory data. Metaphysical ideas, to Kant, were not necessarily created by our

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senses. Kant noticed that society successfully practiced science and math assuming the
veracity of metaphysical realities which Hume claimed they could not know. Kant
proposed a Copernican revolution to resolve the tension.

Kant argued that “our cognition” “arises from two basic sources of the mind.” The
first was the senses, or intuition, which was “our receptivity for impressions.” Similar to
Hume, Kant argued that whatever comes to the person via his senses is a representation,
not the thing in itself. A person only knows the sensory impression. The second source of
knowledge involved “our ability to cognize an object.”432 Here, Kant parted with Hume.
Kant argued that people do have a priori knowledge. The human mind received
sensations and impressions, but it had the capability to categorize the sensations in a way
that “produce presentations to ourselves.”433 Humans understand their sense impressions
according to already existing concepts in their minds. Kant’s revolutionary epistemology
called for an active mind. The mind brings something to its experiences; it imposes its
way of knowing things on the impressions it receives. Human knowledge of metaphysical
objects, including religious awareness, is possible because the human mind determines it.
The thinking subject’s mind, not the objects under study, produces that awareness. The
mind therefore provides the structure for experience.

Kant’s epistemology sought to make room for valid knowledge without
permitting it beyond proper parameters; he attempted to synthesize rationality and
empiricism. An overemphasis on one or the other resulted in a person being unable to


433 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 2:1, 106.
think about anything. He memorably wrote, “Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind.”⁴³⁴ Only from “their union” can “cognition arise.”⁴³⁵ Kant’s middle ground between empiricism and rationalism enormously affected biblical exegesis.

Kant’s epistemology put strict limits on a person’s ability to know spiritual realities through revelation. For Kant, there can be no such thing as real religious revelation originating from outside the human being. All knowledge a thinking person possesses is contained within himself. Impressions come to a person solely through his sensory faculty, and a person organizes his impressions according to the concepts already in his own mind. In addition, the diversity of particular religious claims demonstrated to Kant that doctrinal dogmatism was presumptuous. If reason was universal, then valid religious professions needed to be common to all humanity. Historical religion, such as Christianity, was perceived by Kant as a once serviceable shell,⁴³⁶ bearing forward the kernel of true religion. The goal of the modern exegete of Scripture was to get at the kernel. It is through the process of reasoning that a person and society removes the historical shell and uncovers the grain of reason in order to offer the true veneration of morality which God desires.⁴³⁷ Dogmatism becomes a yoke of bondage to any ecclesiastical body that maintains particular confessions. Doctrinal confessions are

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⁴³⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 2:1, 107. Referencing the mind’s ability to receive presentations, its receptivity, and its ability to produce presentations, its understanding, Kant says in the same place, “Neither of these properties is to be preferred to the other.”


⁴³⁷ Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 96.
cumbrous. Further, “dogmatic faith” appears “dishonest and presumptuous.” It is
“childish” to claim to know the eternity of a person’s destiny based on his life, or to insist
that one needs to request his sins to be forgiven. For Kant, Christ’s death was exemplary,
not vicarious. Knowledge of Christian atonement cannot be accessed because such claims
are beyond the human ability to know. When a church insists on its people adhering to
what it cannot truly know, then it has “placed a yoke upon the multitude.” To Kant,
people needed “independence from perceived authorities plus the exercise of reason” in
order to experience the maturity of the Aufklärung. People need to limit their judgment
to “regulative principles.” Attention needs to be given to practical ethics. For Kant, the
“ideas” of “God and immortality” were unsupported in speculative, or theoretical,
reason. However, even though “we cannot cognize and have insight into” them, “their
possibility can and must in this practical reference be assumed even without our
theoretically cognizing and having insight into them.” In other words, God was a
necessary postulate of practical reason.

For Kant, the reasonable scribe needed to replace the orthodox priest in the work
of biblical exegesis because “religion is hidden within and has to do with moral
disposition.” For Kant, the Christian Scriptures themselves indicated that moral faith

438 Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, 48.
439 Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, 96.
440 Gregory, Unintended Reformation, 118.
441 Cf. Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, 63–66, footnote (three page footnote).
442 Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, preface, 4, 5.
443 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, preface, 4, 6.
444 Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, 99.
was genuine religion, and the universal conviction of humanity. For Kant, rational religion could provide the proper moral interpretation of “sacred texts,” which could be empirically verified. In short, people needed to learn how to live, not be taught what confessional to recite. Humanity needed to emerge from its “self-imposed immaturity,” the “inability to use one’s understanding without guidance from another.” Religion should not be allowed to weigh people down with the chains of “blind superstition,” that “dreadful voice of orthodoxy.” Instead, one must adjust his focus towards veneration of God through an ethical life.

The authors just mentioned are merely representative of inquiry into human understanding that moved biblical exegesis beyond post-Reformation debates and toward evangelicalism. Many more authors with different ideas are worthy of mention, and those touched on certainly had numerous critics. Epistemological theories multiplied and matured throughout the modern era. Hermeneutics began to place greater emphasis on the author and reader of the text. A deeper comprehension of the function and limits of human understanding was needed before the meaning of the biblical text could be known.

445 Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, 104.


447 Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, 121.

448 Despite his perception that the Church needed to “outstrip” (367) Kant’s “careful preservation” of human boundaries, Barth, in his Epistle to the Romans, mentioned certain “affinities with the ethics of Kant.” (468) This was partially because Kant highlighted human limitations. For Barth, the problem of ethics, as with dogmatics, was that humanity was confronted by an unfathomable God (424–430). For Barth, true worship of God (Romans 12:1) was not a mixing of “heaven and earth in the sphere of morals” (432). Instead, ethics were no more than signposts pointing to the glory of God. Ultimately, it was left entirely to “God’s decision” if human behavior in fact served his glory. Only God, the “unobservable One,” could determine if an action was purely ethical (468). Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).
The limitations placed on a person’s ability to know divine truths needed to chasten his
dogmatic confession. It was presumed by some that a bishop-led church had been
exposed as fraudulent; the text of the Bible was tainted; now, revelation itself was
reduced to one’s imagination. With these obstacles to true religion removed, universal
ethical maxims frequently became the popular goal of biblical exegesis.

Conclusion

The historic trajectory of Christian hermeneutics is helpful to evangelicals who
wish to reevaluate how to read the Bible in the present day. Up until the Reformation, an
axiomatic relationship was generally understood between Church and Scripture; a
spiritual interpretation of the text was often presumed to be safeguarded by those in
unbroken succession with Christ and the apostles. Through multiple developments during
and after the Reformation, Biblicism began to gain a stronghold in Protestant thinking.
Specifically, Protestants did not consider the Catholic Church as being necessary for
interpreting Scripture. In time, a conviction grew that any faith, ecclesial or otherwise,
was a hindrance to gaining a clear understanding of the Bible. New challenges were
posed by various modern advances in biblical studies, and they affected both Catholic
and Protestant theologies. Looking forward, both Catholics and Protestants had to
respond to the influence that human intellectual progress had on biblical exegesis.

To this reader, the struggle with biblical modernity can trace part of its origin to
the diminished appreciation for a sacramental Church, a consequence of the Reformation.
The purpose of a hierarchical Church was disregarded by most exegetes soon after the
Reformation. Tradition was generally set aside because of its potential for corruption,
which had been demonstrated in history. By the time of the great increase of Protestant
evangelicalism in America, the consequences of long-standing, anti-ecclesial decisions began to sprout.

At this point in history, immediately prior to various full blown crises in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one needs to pause and consider if the very nature of Christian revelation had been incompletely grasped from the start of modernity. An increasing assumption among several authors of the era was that revelation was either something purely objective which could be analyzed by scientific methods, or it was so remote from human knowing that the thinking subject could never access it. For some, revelation was contained in Scripture alone, but not in the Church; it was in pious believers, but not in the Church; it was in special disclosure, but not in the Church. Of course, some didn’t think revelation was legitimate at all. There was no revelation, especially not in the Church; the Scriptures were flawed, but the Church was severely corrupted. Truth may lie in the deep interior wells of human understanding, but the external Church was not an able assistant to draw it out. As evangelicalism began to develop in America, the sacred function of a hierarchical Church was widely forgotten; tacit religious knowledge which flowed from an organic living community was obstructed. The growing habit of interpreting Scripture outside of an ecclesiastical setting contributed to the secularization of theology. One has to wonder if the ecclesial stones that some claimed were obstacles to biblical exegesis and needed to be removed, were actually the ancient landmarks the Fathers had set.

449 Louth, Discerning, 73.

CHAPTER TWO

AMERICAN PROTESTANT AND EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY: AN IMBALANCED PENDULUM

Introduction

This chapter will analyze how biblical modernity was played out in one of Protestantism’s most fruitful fields: nineteenth-century American evangelicalism. Four major movements will be analyzed: Princeton scholastic theology, revivalism, liberal theology, and Mercersburg theology. Although these four movements are not exhaustive, they sufficiently demonstrate divergent emphases within evangelical theology during the nineteenth century. However, they also exhibit one similarity. Although evangelicalism in America was diverse, and each group distinct from the others, they all make evident the difficulty of interpreting Scripture in its fullness once sacramental ecclesiology has been diminished. Most esteemed Scripture as God’s written Word, but only a few regarded Church as necessary to scriptural exegesis. A high number of evangelicals, especially those associated with revival movements, had a low ecclesiology. However, even high church evangelicals had little regard for other denominations, and less for the Catholic Church. While evangelicalism numerically flourished in America, its soil was often shallow,¹ and polluted with a toxic aversion towards anything ecclesial.

¹ Matthew 13:5.
The concomitant challenges of biblical modernity alongside a weak ecclesiology exacerbated the problems American evangelicals wished would go away. Without an ecclesial Tradition, the Bible became the primary framework within which theology was accomplished. Defense of divine revelation was often reduced to arguments over the inerrancy of the biblical text. Similarly, cheap understandings of *sola scriptura* recast history as a collection of static, random events. The presence of Christ at work in human history, the history he concretely entered, was not a viable concept to some theologies. Specifically, the ongoing mystical presence of Christ in his Church was often neglected, resulting in the Christological dimension of exegesis being diminished. For several evangelicals, theology was derived solely from the Bible; the voice of the Spirit among the living People of God was muted. Further, the disparate evangelical parties were not able to establish a single storehouse where their separate ideas could be integrated. In regards to scriptural exegesis, multiple interpretations of the sacred text were put forward with no mechanism for incorporation of distinct thoughts or reconciliation of differences. As a result, a high frequency of fragmentation occurred among evangelical groups over biblical interpretation. The back-and-forth debates over whose theology was more biblical were left unresolved.

To this reader, the pendulum of American evangelicalism was imbalanced because of its lack of ecclesiology. Looking forward, evangelicals need to attend to the reality that unless the erosion of ecclesiology under their feet stops, they will continue to stumble due to a lack of equilibrium.

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Princeton Scholastic Theology

An analysis of the trajectory of thought developed at Princeton is fundamental to understanding Protestant reactions to the inroads of biblical modernism in America. Although Princeton theologians were not representative of all of American evangelicalism on various theological issues, they operated within a broad consensus regarding the sole authority of the Bible, and they directly interacted with all major evangelical movements. Their influence remains significant to the present day.

In many ways, the crisis surrounding modernism in the Presbyterian Church, specifically through the experience of Princeton Seminary, served as a prototype of similar crises that would soon be replayed in every American denomination. After the conflict and deliberations over biblical interpretation at Princeton, heresy trials began to occur in every denomination, and multiple schisms led to innumerable new communities of faith. Two theologians who best represented Princeton theology were Charles Hodge (1797–1878) and Benjamin Breckinridge (B. B.) Warfield (1851–1921). Princeton theologians were intellectually among the most capable of the nineteenth century. They were astute, well-trained, and had studied abroad.

The nineteenth-century theologians at Princeton Seminary responded to the threat of biblical modernity by stressing the objective credibility of Christian revelation. Since the Scripture was the centerpiece of their faith, they focused their polemics on defending the believability of the Bible. For them, revelation was primarily propositional, and found in the biblical text. Dogmatic conclusions were deduced from divine statements, which meant the text of the Bible needed to be mined for literal statements of truth. Their emphasis on the objective nature of revelation appeared to protect them from the growing
threat of immanence in theology. In this milieu, doctrinal agreement often became the basis of Christian fellowship.

Other American evangelicals, while affirming the integrity of the text of Scripture, even its inerrancy, complained that Princeton theologians had failed to convey the life force of Christianity. For the revivalist, right doctrine was useless without personal conversion and heart-felt religion. And for those evangelicals who were sensitive to the complexity of growing social needs, a privatized faith based on a literary text missed the point of Christianity. A warmer, more practical gospel was needed. For Reformed theologians at Mercersburg, Princeton’s theology failed to grasp the sacramental reality of Christian faith. One of the challenges in this diverse setting was that it was difficult for evangelicals to be self-critical. Intellectual advances in the methodologies of biblical studies commonly resulted in exclusive reliance on one-sided methods. Specifically, the lack of a unifying thread among American evangelicals regarding how to interpret the Bible, which all parties claimed to believe in, often resulted in separation from each other.

Four Aspects of Princeton Theology

Despite their various emphases over generations, Princeton theologians consistently emphasized four aspects in their theology. ³ First, Princeton theology was unashamedly Reformed Confessionalism. This was possibly the school’s most significant feature. The scientific precision of Calvinism led B. B. Warfield to call it the “purest form of religion.” The Reformation was “the greatest revolution of thought” since

Christianity began, and Calvin was its seminal thinker. Unlike Luther’s “mystical and violent preaching,” Calvin’s production was the work of a “most learned” theologian, a labor of “organization and concentration.” Calvin brought a “new exegesis,” a “genuine exegesis” to the Church, a “sober grammatico-historical method.” His “humanistic training” and “acute philological sense,” coupled with “trained skill in the interpretation of texts” and “religious comprehension” made him an exegetical master who possibly surpassed Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, and Cyprian. Calvin was a “man of letters” who fulfilled his saintly role as a reformer through his “literary labors.”

Princeton theologians utilized several Reformed confessions, especially the Westminster, to articulate the truths of Scripture. Charles Hodge credited the Westminster Confession with having “probably the best definition of God ever penned by man.” Although the Westminster and other symbols of faith were subordinate to Scripture, they were considered sure interpretive guides which were not to be rashly revised. Many debates in nineteenth-century Presbyterianism were ignited by suggested changes to the Westminster Confession. Princeton theologians were concerned that the “historical enunciation” of Reformed theology was being compromised in the modern era. As an example, the Calvinistic understanding of total depravity and predestination,

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5 Warfield and Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism 8.

6 Warfield and Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism, 9.

7 Warfield and Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism, 14.


which excluded any human free moral will, was especially highlighted in the debates surrounding the growing threat of revivalism. One of the chief goals of Princeton theologians was “calling attention just at this time to the doctrine of predestination as expressed in the Reformed creeds,” including the “Westminster Standards.”

Strident confessional adherence to the creeds was a recognizable sign of orthodoxy.

Second, within its Calvinistic view, the school’s theologians sought to maintain the highest view of the Bible’s inspiration and authority. The role of the biblical exegete was especially esteemed because the Bible was the locus of revelation. Princeton’s scholars used up-to-date tools to refute biblical modernity. While critical advances in science and literary analysis led some to doubt the veracity of biblical narratives, Princeton used the same developments to defend the reliability of the sacred manuscript.

Princeton theologians argued that the Bible was inspired by God. Their emphasis on the objective aspect of revelation in the text of Scripture naturally led them into debates over inerrancy. For Hodge, the Bible was penned by human hands, but it was primarily regarded as the Word of God; it was written under “supernatural influence.”

The original authors of Scripture were “rendered infallible as teachers.” Hodge and others at Princeton denied the charge that they believed in mechanical dictation as the

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10 Warfield, Studies in Theology, 231.

11 Hodge, Systematic Theology, 6:2, 154.

12 Hodge, Systematic Theology, 6:2, 155. Cf. Hodge’s statement in 4:7, 98: “…these holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, communicated the revelations which they had received not only orally, but in writing, employing not the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; so that we have in the sacred Scriptures the things of the Spirit recorded in the words of the Spirit; which Scriptures, therefore, are the Word of God, — i.e., what God says to man; what He declares to be true and obligatory,—and constitute for his Church the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”
method of biblical inspiration. However, they approach such a view very closely. Although the words of Scripture were not dictated, the authors were “controlled” in order to prevent error in their writings.  

Although God used people “according to their natures,” which meant their human faculties were not suspended, those people were “moved by the Holy Spirit, and their words were his words.” Not only were the written words of the authors inspired, but so were the very thoughts behind their words; God controlled their thinking. Hodge argued that the grammatical meaning of the term “divine inspiration” was univocal; the only possible meaning of the term could be the common meaning which society in the apostolic age attached to the word. “When therefore, the sacred writers use the same words and forms of expression which the ancients used to convey that idea, they must in all honesty be assumed to mean the same thing.” To Hodge, it was assumed in ancient times that “God has access to the human mind and can control its operation,” and he did at times take “possession of particular persons as to make them organs of his communication.” Therefore, when an exegete notices that Paul used the same term as an ancient writer when speaking of inspiration, he naturally concludes the same term carried the same meaning for both authors.

With a pastoral concern, Princeton theologians encouraged people to read the Bible for themselves in order to come to personal faith. Without doubt, “the Bible is a

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14 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 6:2, 156.
16 2 Timothy 3:16.
17 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 6:2, 158.
plain book.” It is “intelligible” for people, who can “read and interpret it for themselves.” As a result of his individual investigation, a person’s “faith may rest on the testimony of the Scriptures, and not that of the Church.”18 Each person must search the Bible to verify the correctness of what the Church teaches him.19 The individual must “pay the greatest deference to the faith of the Church” when interpreting the Scripture, but he cannot lazily think “that Christ has appointed any officer, or class of officers, in his Church to whose interpretation of the Scriptures the people are bound to submit as of final authority.”20 He must diligently study the Bible for himself, trusting that the Spirit who wrote the text is interpreting it.

Third, Princeton’s theologians drew heavily upon the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism21 and the inductive method of Baconian science in order to defend the objective aspect of Christian revelation. Contrary to Hume and Kant, Common Sense epistemology buttressed the theologian’s conviction that divine truths were knowable. And, Bacon’s scientific method of induction provided the biblical exegete with the best method to mine those knowable truths out of the biblical text. Combined, these two thought streams provided rational certainty for Princeton’s theologians.

Princeton College’s own President, John Witherspoon, introduced Scottish Common Sense philosophy to America in 1768. Presbyterian philosophers Francis Hutcheson (1694–1747) from Ireland and Thomas Reid (1710–1796) from Scotland

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21 Another term for “Common Sense” is “naïve realism.”
articulated Common Sense in an effort to respond to skepticism, such as represented by David Hume. Reid, in particular, influenced early American evangelical thought.

Reid argued that all people have a “fixed belief” in an “external material world,” and the belief is not gained by “reasoning or education.” Instead, factual sensations, “phenomena of human nature,” provided people with certain knowledge of the world. For Reid, it was “contrary to philosophy” to begin with hypothetical arguments of ideas and then to refute facts from those hypotheses. He likened idealistic extremes, such as Hume’s and Descartes’, to a Trojan Horse, beautiful in appearance, but resulting in “death and destruction to all science and common sense” once it is let inside the walls.²²

Reid argued that the human mind can directly perceive the reality of the object under investigation; the thing in itself could be known. Common Sense, to Reid, did not refer to widespread popular opinion, as Kant apparently misunderstood Reid to mean.²³ Rather, it referenced basic principles at work in the process of human reasoning and belief formation. In his Essay on Judgment, Reid listed twelve principles of “contingent truth.” His first was “the existence of everything of which I am conscious.”²⁴ A person is confident in what he perceives because he is built to accept such conclusions. To Reid, the skeptic erred when he denied the validity of belief because he failed to analyze human constitution. Unwittingly, skepticism itself relies on common sense; the skeptic assumes,

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²² Thomas Reid, An Inquiry into the Human Mind... With an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author (Edinburgh: R. Tullis, 1823; PDF e-book), 5:8, 86.


for example, laws of non-contradiction. Even “Mr. Hume, after annihilating body and mind, time and space, action and causation, and even his own mind, acknowledges the reality of the thoughts, sensations, and passions of which he is conscious.”\textsuperscript{25} Without these common assumptions rooted in human nature, the skeptic would have no footing for his views. Human nature “requires us to believe” what is obvious, the commonly held “passions and operations of our minds.”\textsuperscript{26} Reid used pain as an illustration: “When a man is conscious of pain, he is certain of its existence.” The authoritative conviction of the reality of pain is “immediate and intuitive;” it is not the result of protracted reasoning.\textsuperscript{27} Reid helped empower Princeton’s exegetes, who regarded the Bible as the first principle of revelation, to confidently claim knowledge of divine truths. Using Reid’s idea of Common Sense, they were able to approach Scripture positively with the assumption that its truths were fully knowable.

Francis Bacon provided Princeton exegetes with the scientific method of induction, which they used to extricate meaning from the Bible. For Bacon, idols were false paradigmatic structures that went unquestioned, yet governed popular conclusions.\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{itemize}
  \item [27] Reid, \textit{Powers of the Human Mind}, 6:5, 301.
  \item [28] Francis Bacon, \textit{New Organon}, Aphorism 39-44: 40-42.
\end{itemize}
arduous research. Bacon saw the need to rid science of toxic superstitious assumptions; for Princeton exegetes, theology needed a similar purging.

Princeton’s theologians as well as many other evangelicals confidently used the tools of Bacon’s inductive methods for interpreting Scripture. Christian theology needed to be purged of mysticism, Tradition, and anything else which clouded the perspicuous meaning of the raw text of the Bible. As a science, theology assumed that “all the facts” belonging to its “sphere of truth” were contained in the words of the Bible. It was the “scientific presentation of all the facts concerning God” interpreted from the text of the Bible.

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31 Cf. Hodge’s introduction to *Systematic Theology*, 10: “The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his storehouse of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches, is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.” Also, cf. Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge, Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 354: “To answer the skepticism shown by those who no longer thought the mind adequate to understand God’s will and character, Hodge turned to Bacon and his scientific method to buttress his long-held inductive theological predilections.” Gutjahr also notes the “stunning absence” of any mention of Bacon in Hodge’s lectures. Also, cf. Mark A Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 157: Noll quotes Leonard Woods Jr. as confessing that his own appropriation of the Bible was regulated “by the maxims of Bacon and Newton.” Noll also notes that Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* was the “best known statement” of “scientific biblicism” after the Civil War.


For Hodge, an inductive hermeneutic operated with three assumptions. First, it assumed the objective reality of the subject matter. The revelation of God was objective and observable in the text of the Bible; divine truths were not mysterious. Second, it assumed the capacity of the human mind to comprehend the subject matter and “subsume it under the forms of its thinking and to rationalize it.” Divine truths needed to be catalogued. Third, it assumed the words of the Bible were a sufficient medium for communicating the subject matter of revelation to the human mind. Divine truths were discoverable in the text.

Fourth, Princeton theologians emphasized religious experience. Despite their reputation as scholastics, and their stress on the objective work of God, they gave prominence to the moving of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the individual Christian. Yet, where they placed the moving of the Spirit in their theology kept them distinct from revivalists. According to Noll, Princeton theologians without question made personal conversion a part of their theology. Of particular interest for this study is how they understood the role of the Spirit in reading Scripture.

Princeton theologians were not pure Biblicists; they understood both the composition of the text and the proper reading of it as primarily a divine event. They attempted to maintain both the perspicuity of Scripture and the need for divine illumination. In order to correctly interpret the sacred text, the exegete must be a “true

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36 Ibid.
38 Princeton theologians sought a critical balance between scientific exegesis and reliance on the Spirit. Cf. Gutjahr, Charles Hodge, 354. Gutjahr speculates that the reason Hodge did not specifically mention Bacon
Christian” who “partakes” of the faith which God gives to select individuals. Personal faith was established neither on reason nor emotional persuasion because God elected whom He desired to believe. Faith derived from Scripture was an “internal” “demonstration of the Spirit,” a “supernatural illumination imparting spiritual discernment.” Inner pneumatic stimulus renders illumination “irresistible;” it cannot be “shaken off” voluntarily, but it “is a power, controlling at once the convictions, the affections, and the conscience” of the recipient.  

39 The Spirit provides an “inward state of mind which enables us to apprehend the truth.” True faith is the acceptance of the revelation of God’s Son contained “in every part of the Bible.” The true believer naturally assumes the plenary inspiration and infallibility of the written text because of the inner work of the Spirit. However, reliance on the Spirit’s illumination could not be reduced to a private, mystical, or experienced-based interpretation of the text. Neither could it be entrusted to the authority of a church. The perspicuity of the objective text prevented such extremes.

Princeton theologians were often wary of the study of religion, as found in Schleiermacher, 41 because it reduced theology to psychology. Such an approach examined constantly changing people. Princeton theologians were equally suspicious of Christocentric theology because it was deductive, not inductive, in its methodology.

by name while using Bacon’s methods was because he did not want his students to reduce theology to a pure science. Hodge sought to preserve the Holy Spirit’s role in exegesis. However, Hodge’s idea of illumination appeared to primarily be personal and private.


40 Hodge, Systematic Theology, 6:3:174.

41 For example, cf. Hodge, Systematic Theology, 6:3:176–179.
Certainly, systematic theology might be aided by a study of nature, human history, biblical ethics, historical theology, and other disciplines, but the special handmaid of systematics needed to be exegetical theology. Biblical exegesis was a pure science that was to be practiced separately from all other disciplines. It “does its work wholly without thought or anxiety as to the use that is to be made of its results.”\(^{42}\) Systematic theology, in particular, is “not a historical discipline.” It “does not care” what has been or is held to be historically true. Instead, it searches for what is demonstrably true. Just like geological science, its ultimate goal is to organize the static “facts into one all-comprehending system.”\(^{43}\) Further, the superstitious teachings of the Church needed to give way to accurate, scientific analyses of the sacred text.

**Inerrancy**

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, particularly, articulated a specific form of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy in his scholarly conflicts with historical critics. For Warfield, the physical text of the Bible, in its original autographs, was without error in all matters it addressed. With this argument, he possibly placed the entire weight of defending Christianity on the integrity of the biblical text; the text itself was the first principle of the faith. For Warfield, in “point of authority,”\(^{44}\) there is no distinction between God and Scripture.

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Many of Warfield’s polemics focused on the objective credibility of the Bible. As an example, he critiqued the modern notion popular in his day which claimed that New Testament authors did not cite the Old Testament as God’s actual words. For Warfield, this view was not only inconsistent with Jewish customs, but also with the historical understanding of pagans. The Bible was “the living voice of God,” and there has always been an “absolute identification” between the text of the Bible and the “speaking God.” Warfield supported this claim from the grammar of the biblical text itself and in the history surrounding the text. He cited numerous sacred passages which synonymized the biblical text with God’s voice, and he cited extra-biblical authors, such as Philo, to convey similar Jewish exegetical assumptions. Jesus’ use of “it is written” during his temptation was also used by Paul in Romans 3:10. The phrase was understood by both Jews and pagans as a reference to divine speech. Paul, in line with common Jewish presumptions of the day, quoted the text of Scripture as if it were the “oracle” of God. For Warfield, the notion that the biblical text was inspired or “God breathed” had prevailed since the beginning of Christianity. It had only “recently been broken” by a “new view” of lexical interpretation. As another example, some nineteenth-century scholars, such as August Hermann Cremer, argued that the Greek term that translated “divinely inspired” in 2 Timothy 3:16 suggested inspiration was an effect of the

45 Warfield, “It Says,” 472.

46 Warfield, “It Says,” 473.


Scriptures, not their cause. Cremer and other “higher critics” claimed that the term indicated that the biblical text inspired its readers; the texts themselves were not necessarily God’s voice. To support their views, they referenced Plutarch’s use of the identical Greek term that is found in Timothy and its appearance in the fifth book of the Sibylline Oracle, which they claimed had Jewish origins. Cremer and other critics claimed that the term possibly had different meanings in those extra-biblical texts, and that Paul used the term with their ancient understanding of the term, not the latter Christian idea. In response, Warfield marshaled grammatical and historical arguments to refute the “new” lexical conclusions. Certainly, Scripture itself claims its origin in God, thereby justifying an understanding of the term in Timothy as meaning inspired by God. However, Cremer’s use of Plutarch was flawed because Cremer assumed Plutarch’s source for the term was Jewish. To Warfield, this assumption was unfounded. Warfield argued that the manuscripts Plutarch relied upon give evidence of a Christian interpolation, as does the fifth Sibylline Oracle. The traditional Christian understanding of inspiration coming from God might actually be the influential idea behind all the texts in question.49 Warfield argued that Cremer and others did not carefully analyze the sources behind the texts they were analyzing. Their exegetical error in Timothy derived from a wrong assumption regarding the use of the term “divine inspiration” in antiquity; they were not sufficiently critical of their own criticism.

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Ecclesiology

Princeton theologians stressed a supernatural view of Scripture, but not a concomitant view of the Church. Although the Presbyterian Church was considered high Church in contrast to other groups, their theologians did not advocate an ecclesial interpretation of the Bible. Instead, they claimed that the correct understanding of the Church was derived from the Bible alone. The true Church was comprised of believing Christians, known only to God, in all Christian congregations. The universal Church crossed all particular denominational lines; it was identified by right belief, not by historic association. To Hodge, Christianity had endured whole periods of dispersion and heresy. The claim that the Church consisted in a specific organization would have suggested that sinners occupied God’s Temple, which was unacceptable. The true Church could only be defined as those who have personally been justified and cleansed of guilt. The Church was indeed visible by multiple means, but it was not an exclusive organization. It was visible by virtue of being composed of human beings, not ghosts; it was visible by the good works of its members; it was visible by the obvious moral separation its members had from the world; it was visible as the true church sustaining

50 Cf. Gutjahr, Charles Hodge, 239. Charles Hodge received intense criticism for defending Catholic baptism as legitimate because he believed that individual Catholics could be genuine parts of the universal community of believers. However, he was only being consistent with his own views in this stand. Hodge’s “ecumenical tint” did not grant the Catholic Church authority to interpret Scripture. Nor was he suspending his complaints with other aspects of Catholic theology. Hodge simply affirmed that some individual Catholics genuinely believed enough truth to be saved, thus validating their baptisms.


52 Hodge, “Idea of the Church,” 258.

the various external churches in which the true members operated. For Charles Hodge, even the term “Body of Christ” did not reference a specific physical, organized body of people.54 Although no one outside of the Church could be saved, it was not because the Church conveyed the grace of God. Instead, it was because anyone who was saved was already in the Church.

Summary

To this reader, Princeton theologians avoided the popular secularization of theology by maintaining the divine inspiration of the biblical text. They also avoided a philosophy of immanence which blurred distinctions between God and the world. They engaged the top scholarship of their day, and their astute attention to the text helped unmask several anti-supernatural biases within modern biblical criticism. This helped them maintain their confession of historic Christian dogma. However, they painted themselves into a philological corner by disavowing divinely mandated ecclesial exegesis. Their faith in the Spirit did not extend to a universal operation of the Spirit in the Body he organized. Instead, the contemporary scholar with the best access to ancient grammar and history authoritatively explained Scripture. When scholars disagreed, their only recourse was to develop a more convincing forensic argument.

Other evangelicals became aggravated by the scientific method of Princeton theologians. They argued that scientific analysis of objective revelation failed to get at the deeper realities of Christian faith. In the end, scientific exegesis was incapable of maintaining the unity of faith even among others who claimed to believe in sola

Exclusive reliance on Scripture could not avoid private interpretations of the sacred text. ⁵⁵

**Revivalism**

American revivalism, in its multiple variations, sought to reform aspects of religious life by emphasizing a genuine, direct encounter with God. Individuals were summoned to immediately respond in saving faith to a biblical message, resulting in instant salvation. Despite the movement’s emphasis on encountering God, they had little regard for God’s people. Not only was the historic Roman Catholic Church reviled, but revivalists increasingly were critical of their own Protestant denominations, traditions, and ordained clergy. Some revivalists even considered any organized religion as a hindrance to genuine divine encounters. For the revivalists, no mediation was needed between the individual and God. A pastor, priest, bishop, and church could assist the individual, but were secondary to authentic religious experience.

Despite the revivalists’ positive emphasis on connecting with Jesus, the movement’s ecclesiology prevented them from satisfactorily responding to biblical modernism. Revivalists gave prominence to securing one’s own eternal salvation, which took attention away from the development of theological thought. This approach eventually led to an anti-intellectual disposition in several leaders. By the twentieth century, revivalism had obstructed legitimate venues for evangelicals to seriously engage

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⁵⁵ Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 15–16. *Sola Scriptura* possibly became more intensified in America than Europe due to the lack of strong religious institutions. America, at the time, had no Oxford, and there were not vibrant inter-denominational institutions. Without a strong ecclesial Tradition, theologians naturally put maximum emphasis on the text of the Bible.
biblical modernism. Many outside of the movement considered revivalism as born in the backwoods and irrelevant to the modern world.

Revivalism has impacted America’s religious landscape throughout its history. The Great Awakening, a movement which involved Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) and George Whitefield (1714–1770), began in the first part of the eighteenth century. It was followed by a Second Great Awakening near the turn of the nineteenth century, which included the ministry of Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875). Revival fervor spread freely throughout the entirety of the new nation and penetrated every denomination. The societal passion for liberty with its recent successes in the Revolution, combined with Protestant *sola scriptura*, helped ignite wildfire expansion of revivals. The American frontier was perceived by conservative New Englanders as a wild, untamed primitive existence. Society was expanding “faster than civilized institutions could keep up,” and illiterate people had “strayed too far from the institutional order of decent society.”56 The civilized Presbyterians back in the cultured northeast eventually left the Christianization of these half-savages to the Baptists and Methodists.

**Calvinism and Revivals**

Ironically, early revivalism in America was generated by Calvinists, such as Jonathan Edwards. As a Calvinist, Edwards advocated predestination; however, he justified revivals by arguing that the “objects of God’s favor” needed to be pointed out by

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“distinguishing and clear marks;” a “sign of a state of grace” was needed. Without ridiculing the extreme “outcries, faintings and the like” of some converts, Edwards defended revivals in general. The notable “great and abiding alteration” that occurred in peoples’ lives was true evidence that the effect of his work, and that of friend and fellow Calvinist George Whitefield, was genuine. In his sermon “True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils,” Edwards argued that moral changes in peoples’ lives evidenced an authentic work of the Spirit. Revivals influenced moral behavior in all strata of society.

By the early nineteenth century, revivalism was unsettling the intellectual foundation of Calvinism by calling people to freely give up their sins and become followers of Christ. The revivalists’ shift of accent from God’s sovereign decision to human ability to decide brought tension into the Presbyterian Church; the doctrines of predestination and double predestination were threatened. Salvation was now open to all,

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and the eternal destiny of each individual lay in his own hands.\textsuperscript{62} Presbyterians struggled to find a balance between old, revered theological convictions and the new reality of large-scale revival conversions; but, they could not.

The New Haven theology provided a bridge for Presbyterians from the dominant old Calvinism to what they considered to be broader thinking. New School Presbyterianism advanced with a modified Calvinism, openness to revivals, emphasis on the power of human agency in conversion,\textsuperscript{63} concern for moral reform, and interdenominational cooperation on various projects. Yale Professor Nathaniel William Taylor (1786–1858) was an example of a theologian who sought to reconcile the revivals with Calvinism, with what could be called “Arminianized Calvinism.”\textsuperscript{64} Taylor rejected the imputation of Adam’s guilt to all humanity, but still claimed people were innately disposed toward sin.\textsuperscript{65} There could be no sin until it was actually committed; both sin and repentance were voluntary. The evident moral capabilities of humans, according to Taylor, implied free agency. Alone, a person will not do what he can do; he will not choose the good, although capable, because of his inherent disposition. He needs God’s help. For Taylor, revivalism, where God’s Word was preached by a man of God, was God’s provision of grace. The persuasive effect of the preacher roused the individual’s ability to freely respond to God’s Spirit.

\textsuperscript{62} McLoughlin, \textit{Revivals}, 123.

\textsuperscript{63} Gutjahr, \textit{Charles Hodge}, 135.

\textsuperscript{64} McLoughlin, \textit{Revivals}, 121.

\textsuperscript{65} McLoughlin, \textit{Revivals}, 117.
The efforts to integrate Calvinism with revivalism created conflict among Presbyterians. Lyman Beecher (1775–1863), renowned Presbyterian minister, delivered a sermon in 1823 that demonstrated the diverging views within American Calvinism. Following the title of his message, *The Faith Once Delivered to the Saints*, taken from Jude 3, Beecher claimed up front, “That men are free agents,” and that “all men are invited sincerely … to return to God.”66 Beecher’s authority for his “new” interpretation lay in the “accordance” his views had with the “direct and most obvious meaning of the text. By obvious meaning, I intend that which is actually suggested, without note or comment, to the minds of honest and unlettered men.”67 The denominational tension became known as the Old School and New School controversy. Princeton’s Charles Hodge was among the leaders of the Old School group, which strictly emphasized God’s sovereign power in human conversion. In 1835, Beecher was accused of heresy by Old School Calvinists for his new views of evangelism. Although he was acquitted, he and other New School ministers were expelled from the denomination in 1837 because of their integration of Calvinism and Arminianism. During the 1837 assembly, the Old School won a formal victory against New School measures calling for the “dissolution” of every church presbytery, or synod “not organized on Presbyterian principles.”68

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Presbyterian schism of 1837 was not healed until the latter part of the nineteenth century, and then only for a brief time.

Over time, many revivalists, including Charles Finney, left the Presbyterian Church and began to openly teach that people had free will before God. Finney’s revivals, in particular, began in upper New York. As other revivals spread in the trans-Appalachian frontiers of Kentucky and Tennessee and beyond, the high demand for missionary preachers resulted in many new ministers, whether Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian, who were largely uneducated. Despite the low level of theological training among the revivalists, they effectively appealed to the sentiments of the people, and witnessed boisterous and emotional responses. Calvinism faded in both the North and South; it was increasingly perceived as outmoded, and European Deism was not biblical enough to be seriously considered.69 Through the Baptist and Methodist revivals, the common people could touch God, hear the Bible for themselves, and learn to live holy lives. Salvation was not only for the elect, but for “whosoever will.” In time, the movement became marked as broadly anti-traditionalist.70 Theological standard bearers such as John Calvin were forgotten, and reliable symbols such as the Westminster Confession were disregarded. An anti-intellectual reputation among evangelists especially surged during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Strict theological confession became secondary to immediate experience. Kentucky revivalist ministers Robert Marshall and John Thompson, after being confronted with quotes from Calvin

69 McLoughlin, Revivals, 109.

that demonstrated their theological errors, replied, “We are not personally acquainted with the writings of John Calvin, nor are we certain how nearly we agree with his views of divine truth; neither do we care.”

Unlike Finney’s revivals, the ones that developed in the West and South, including southern Illinois and Missouri, were primarily led by Baptists and Methodists, such as Peter Cartwright (1785–1872). Cartwright was converted at age 17, and was soon thereafter licensed to preach as a Methodist circuit rider. He preached countless revival camp meetings in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Illinois for over 50 years. Unlike the northern branches of Protestant denominations, “who wanted at least a semblance of learning and doctrine from their preachers, the southern Methodists spurned learning.”

Millions were brought into evangelical denominations through the Second Great Awakening, which helped create an evangelical coalition that, although it was not formally defined, significantly shaped American culture. By 1840, one in three Americans was Methodist.

Biblicism and Revivals

With little regard for ecclesiology or Tradition, revivalists claimed exclusive support for their activities from the Bible. The problem was that the revivalists’ opponents did the same. In the end, it came down to who was more “biblical” than the other. The deeper problem was that there was no ordained Church which both sides fully trusted to adjudicate their debates. The idea of a sacramental Body of Christ had long
since been lost in the bottom of their saddle bags. This is evidenced in Charles Hodges’ polemics with Charles Finney.

To Hodge, the foundational flaw of Finney’s work was that it “was not based on the authority of God speaking in his Word, but on human reason.” It was not based on the biblical text; therefore, it was a philosophy, not a theology. Hodge’s particular complaint was that Finney emphasized human moral capability to a degree that diminished God’s role in human salvation. For Hodge, God’s will was impotent to “impose” itself in Finney’s theology; it “only discloses what is obligatory.”

Finney, using the same Scripture, believed that every person was a moral agent capable of choosing God’s grace. Finney insisted that a “right view,” which did not chill “the heart of the Church,” was needed. Both “election and free agency” needed to be taught. The innate moral intuition within everyone convinced Finney that human nature was not essentially sinful. Rather, people individually choose to sin. The role of the preacher, therefore, was to awaken the sinner’s inner moral consciousness so he can choose to accept God’s redemptive grace.

Prior to his conversion, Charles Finney had been pursuing a law career. Shortly after his conversion in the autumn of 1821, he gave up that endeavor and was licensed to preach by the spring of 1824. He was ordained as a Presbyterian home missionary.

Although Finney had privately studied with his pastor, he had not seriously examined the

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74 Gutjahr, *Hodge*, 244–245.

catechism or Westminster Confession by the time he was licensed. Nonetheless, Finney quickly became renowned as a persuasive revivalist in western New York by using his legal training and natural abilities. He preached revival meetings throughout New York and surrounding states. Frustrated with the Presbyterian Church, he left them in 1836 to serve in a Congregational Church. At Oberlin College, Finney served as a professor in Systematic Theology, Pastoral Theology, and later became the school’s president. He concurrently served as pastor of Oberlin’s First Congregational Church.

The tension between the Reformed theology of the day and Finney’s impulse to revivalism is seen in Finney’s sermon, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts.” Interpreting Ezekiel 18:31’s command to “Make ye a new heart,” Finney concluded that the heart is “something over which we have control; something voluntary.” We are called upon and are therefore capable to change our “moral characters” and “dispositions.” This struck the core nerve of Calvinists, such as Princeton’s Charles Hodge.

Hodge considered Finney’s methods to be showmanship; he was uneasy with Finney’s emphasis on practical results because it diminished the sovereign role of God in

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77 Oneida County, New York, was one of the first regions greatly affected by Finney’s revivals. Although Oneida was near frontier territory during Finney’s revivals in 1825, it was growing through the migration of several families from Massachusetts and Connecticut. Several of these families came from early American Puritans. Finney moved to Oneida as a young boy, and he married his first wife, Lydia Andrews, in Oneida County. Cf. John Frost, Moses Gillett, and Noah Coe, A Narrative of the Revival of Religion in the County of Oneida Particularly in the Bounds of the Presbytery of Oneida, in the Year 1826 (Utica: Hastings & Tracy, 1826; PDF e-book).


human salvation. Hodge accused Finney of embracing modernity by relying on calculated methods to generate a religious response from people. In response Finney argued that methods were essential to “success.” As a man of his era, Finney saw the need for premeditated techniques in ministry. For Finney, there was nothing miraculous about a revival. A good revival required a natural scientific theory in which to operate; it was the result of using the right tactics. In Finney’s thinking, political and sales techniques were divine tools to gain others’ attention. Biblical exposition, like politics, needed to involve psychological persuasion towards conversion. People can clearly understand the truths of Scripture on their own once their attention is gained, and they are naturally capable to respond with their own moral decisions. Consequently, the effective revivalist will employ the same laws that govern the harvesting of wheat to bring people into the faith by selecting the best and most efficient tools of reaping.80 “New Measures are necessary from time to time to awaken attention and bring the Gospel to bear upon the public mind.”81 For Finney, the measures belonging to the professional revivalist included longer meetings that wearied the audience, making them ready to convert, widespread dissemination of literature, direct appeal to the individual’s conscience, camp meetings that lasted several days, and anything else that might awaken the slumbering soul. Finney also employed the anxious seat, also called the mourner’s bench. It was an appointed chair where those who were anxious over their own souls could come for personal counsel. The seat was intentionally placed in a public location at the front of the

80 McLoughlin, Revivals, 125.

81 Finney, “A Wise Minister will be Successful,” in Lectures, 168.
assembly. The goal was to prevent the sinner from keeping his troubles private, and enabling him to “break away from the chains of pride”\textsuperscript{82} through exposure to others.

Charles Hodge was much more critical of Finney than he was of Edwards’ revivals from a century earlier. When reviewing the revivals of Edwards, Hodge criticized the lack of order and polity more than the theology. The eighteenth-century revivalists, unlike Finney, were at least committed to the Westminster Confession and catechism.\textsuperscript{83} The lack of decorum in the celebration of claimed bodily manifestations of the Spirit, such as people fainting, violently shaking, or crying out loud, raised Hodge’s doubts that Edwards’ revivals were a genuine move of the Spirit. However, Hodge’s greater concern with Finney was the lack of consistency with Calvinistic orthodoxy. Unlike eighteenth-century revivalists, Finney’s theology stood in opposition to Reformed thinking.

Finney understood that he was at odds with the traditional Reformed understanding of depravity, which renders humanity incapable to affect any change in itself. However, he based his new biblical exposition on his three-step exegetical method. First, Finney sought to understand the “meaning” of the command in the text. What does the passage plainly say? Second, he ascertained the reasonableness of the biblical command. Is the plain biblical command doable for the reader? Third, Finney sought for “consistency” between his particular text and other biblical texts which seemed to contradict his interpretation. Can the plain interpretation harmonize with different


\textsuperscript{83} Gutjahr, \textit{Hodge}, 190–191.
passages that appear to be contradictory? For Finney, theology did not need to search outside of the Bible to understand divine truths.

As revivalism grew throughout the nineteenth century, Finney and other leaders became increasingly critical of established churches and ordained leaders. Revivalism presumed the decline of true spirituality within Christian communities; it “presupposes the church is sunk down in a backsidden state.” God had chosen evangelists to “excite” the hearts and minds of the people. The people were “sluggish” in their faith and needed to wake up, but the Church had “so little firmness and stability of purpose” that it was impotent to help. The Church was asleep and not sufficiently “enlightened” to counteract the spiritual decline of its people. Therefore, God chose to go outside of the Church structure in order to lead the sheep back into the fold. In his lecture “How to Preach the Gospel,” Finney argued that the decline of vitality in Christianity “throughout the history of the Church from the days of the Apostles” was “chargeable upon ministers.” In another place, Finney specifically accused the Presbyterian ministers of being “amazingly jealous” over others directing spiritual meetings. They “always freeze a prayer meeting” and become obstacles to the work of God. The young men who are ordained in the “poor Presbyterian Church” are so obsessed with theological controversy that they have

84 Finney, “How to Change your Heart,” in Lectures, 41.
88 Finney, “Meetings for Prayer,” in Lectures, 120.
lost sight of true religion. As a result, “the Church is groaning in all her borders for want of suitable ministers.”90 Finney complained that denominations were not favorable towards “new measures.” They do not tolerate “any of this new-light preaching, or of these evangelists that go around the country preaching.”91 He concluded that those in the Presbyterian Church are as “absolutely fanatical” as those leading the Roman Catholic Church because they each adhere to “particular forms and modes” in the Church. “The fact is, that God has established, in no church, any particular form, or manner of worship, for promoting the interests of religion.”92 Just as Luther and the Reformers countered the “ridiculous things of the Roman Catholics” by introducing “new measures,” “new modes,” and “new expedients,” so the revivalists “in Divine Providence” have been “set forward as prominent in introducing new innovations.”93 God was behind the revivalists, but the Church’s ordained clergy were obstructing divine initiatives.

Certainly, the revivalists quoted Luther, Calvin, the Westminster and other confessions when it was beneficial. However, it ultimately did not matter to revivalists whether they themselves were consistent with Tradition. Finney argued that the Bible was the only authority in determining the validity of his new measures. “Sadly,” Finney wrote, “young converts” are taught the “catechism” instead of the “Bible.”94 He referenced Paul’s admonition that all sacred services be conducted “decently and in

91 Finney, “When A Revival is to be Expected,” in Lectures, 32.
94 Finney, “Instructions to Young Converts,” in Lectures, 376.
and then insisted that his measures, including both the “anxious seat” and “protracted meetings,” were within the biblical mandate. That was all the authority Finney needed.

The revivalists’ low esteem for ecclesiastical organizations and traditions naturally led to a diminished appreciation for theology. The Christian religion was often reduced by them to the immediate conversion of souls. A theological education was not needed for the primary task of converting sinners. With the obvious exception of Jonathan Edwards, many revivalists downplayed the need for formal theological study. Later in the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, the ministries of Dwight Lyman Moody (1837–1899) and William Ashley “Billy” Sunday (1862–1935) became prominent, and served as examples of effective, but uneducated clergy. Moody was educated through grade school, and Sunday into high school. Yet both men helped shape the religious faith of hundreds of thousands of people.

The New Century and Revivals

Finney, perhaps speaking for the next century of revivalists, had written that “the great object of all the means of grace is to aim directly at the conversion of sinners.”\footnote{1 Corinthians 14:40.} The editor to D. L. Moody’s works, written during Moody’s lifetime, wrote that if Moody, in his theological outlines, left out any teaching “usually found in Systematic Theology,” it was because the evangelist replaced it with something else he deemed

\footnote{Finney, “Meetings for Prayer,” in \textit{Lectures}, 128.}
“more important.”97 In his *Outline of the Doctrine of God*, Moody wrote on what was most important in the teaching on God: the practical love of God for sinners.98 He addressed none of the formal questions often associated with Theology Proper. Moody’s urgency for the personal salvation of sinners is sensed in his closing remarks to a gathering of businessmen at the Chicago Board of Trade: “I beg of you as a friend and brother, do not go out without salvation. May God wake up every soul here tonight!”99 According to Billy Sunday, “the first thing to remember about being saved is that salvation is a personal matter.” “The world is not hungry for a religion of theory. There was a time when people were interested intensely in fine-spun theological theories;” but, that time had thankfully passed for Sunday.100 “People are dissatisfied with philosophy, science, new thought—all these amount to nothing when you have a dead child in the house. These do not solace the troubles and woes of the world.”101 “The way to salvation is not Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Vassar or Wellesley. Environment and culture can’t put you into heaven unless you accept Jesus Christ.”102

Although revivalists were often involved in social relief efforts, they were wary of allowing the Gospel ministry to be reduced to social action. Charles Finney was a fierce

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101 Sunday, *Old Time Religion*.

102 Ibid.
opponent of slavery, but he was even more concerned with “Who does God say will go to heaven?” Finney warned of potential divine damnation for those who joined the Anti-Slavery Society but refused to pay their dues. Their hypocrisy and dishonesty risked their souls.\textsuperscript{103} D. L. Moody poured incredible effort into relief work for the poor, but when preaching on Christ’s command to “Seek first” the Kingdom and its righteousness,\textsuperscript{104} Moody admitted reservation at giving loaves of bread alongside the Gospel of salvation. “If I had the Bible in one hand and a loaf in the other the people always looked first at the loaf; and that was just contrary to the order laid down in the Gospel.”\textsuperscript{105} Revivalist Billy Sunday echoed similar concerns when he preached “You cannot bathe anybody into the kingdom of God. You cannot change their hearts by changing their sanitation.”\textsuperscript{106} Sunday supported education and charity, but saw them as secondary. “It is a Christian act to maintain schools and universities, but the road into the kingdom of God is not by the bathtub, the university, social service, or gymnasium, but by the blood-red road of the cross of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{107}

Revivalism, it can be argued,\textsuperscript{108} benefitted Christianity in various ways. It kept a legitimate concern for personal faith in view, called for moral habits to be developed

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{103} Finney, “Instructions To Young Converts,” in Lectures, 378.

\textsuperscript{104} Matthew 6:33.

\textsuperscript{105} Moody, “Righteousness First,” in Moody, 430–431. Moody’s statement was an honest admission. However, it should be noted that Moody Bible Institute, to the present day, is heavily involved in practical Christian ministry. From Moody’s day, the school has cared consistently for more than the spiritual welfare of people.

\textsuperscript{106} Sunday, “Spiritual Food For Hungry World,” at Billy Sunday Online Sermons.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{108} Cf. Noll, Scandal, 62.
\end{footnotesize}
among its people, and it gave attention to marginalized groups, such as slaves, poor, and immigrants. Genuine moral “alterations” in society, such as the abolition of slavery, can partially be credited to the influence of revivals.

Summary

To this reader, the revivalists’ disregard of the presence of Christ in the actual structure of his Church hindered them from listening to voices other than their own. For the revivalists, ecclesial structure was practical, not sacramental; the Church was the result, not the source, of the grace of God within society. To some evangelists, the Church was considered an obstacle to true religion. The upshot of this was Church discipline or theological correction was often perceived as persecution, and not as divine restoration. For the revivalist, Scripture was sacred. However, their Biblicism hampered their ability to provide any lasting reform to American Christianity. If God was only found in the Book, then the weight of Christian revelation was solely carried by the text of Scripture. In reality, however, that burden fell on the shoulders of the individual because the meaning of the Bible was supposedly plain to him. Such privatization of a universal religion, such as Christianity, resulted in a multitude of “unfettered interpretations” of Scripture, which only increased fragmentation among Protestants. Numerous new denominations sprang up from the seeds of discord during this time, including Disciples of Christ, Adventists, Mormons, various offshoots of Methodists and new groups of Presbyterians, each with its own distinctive. Although revivalists, like Princeton theologians, were confident that the Bible could be sufficiently understood by

109 Noll, Scandal, 73.
individuals, the revivalists’ adulation of experience created new types of factions within Christianity. Holiness and Pentecostal groups began forming their own separate fellowships by the early twentieth century.

A long list of beneficial social services, including care for the homeless and orphans were generated by revivalists. However, some of them saw their own good works as ancillary to true gospel ministry. This reveals a deeper problem in their comprehension of salvation in Jesus Christ, and it is related to their impoverished ecclesiology. When the Body of Christ becomes invisible, salvation is often reduced to a spiritual deliverance, and care for the poor becomes nothing beyond a stepping stone to real spiritual ministry.

Sadly, revivalism could not speak to biblical modernism adequately. While it maintained the supernatural character of the Bible, it insufficiently engaged the ordinary aspects of the text. Revivalists, such as Moody, were suspicious of modern science and only read books that helped him better understand the Bible. Obsession with other-worldly concerns possibly contributed to disengagement with modern currents of thought. The lack of an ecclesiastical structure resulted in revivalists being largely incapable of learning from or responding to literary critics. Low ecclesiology liberated them to simply ignore those with whom they disagreed. A suspicious attitude toward formal theological training prevented revivalists from discovering reforming truths within the very book to which they were devoted. Theological inquiry was constrained to what was essential to being saved, resulting in another form of theology’s demystification. The spiritually formative role of an ongoing theological pedagogy was bartered away for a one way ticket out of this world.
American Liberalism

American liberal theology\textsuperscript{110} formed from several sources, including intellectual development in natural sciences, historical studies, social sciences, philosophy, and literary criticism. It also grew in reaction to what was perceived to be blind Biblicism, dead dogmatism, revivalist revelries, and silence regarding obvious social evils. Many Christian theologians and clergymen saw a need to return to the genuine Christian faith which existed prior to later adulterations. Often, liberal theology discounted supernatural concepts attached to ecclesiology, dogmatics, and the Scriptures.

Attention will be given to two broad theological movements within nineteenth-century America which can be loosely categorized as liberal. First, attention will be given to historical criticism and its polemics with Biblicists at Princeton. Second, focus will be directed to attempts at making evangelization more socially prophetic. The works of Charles Briggs, Horace Bushnell and Walter Rauschenbusch will be utilized.

Historical Criticism and Inerrancy

Scientific exegesis of the Scriptures was welcomed by many because it was assumed it would provide a surer footing for the Christian faith. Once “legal compulsion”\textsuperscript{111} towards Church authority disappeared, the biblical exegete would be free to explore the text without inhibition. Efficient grammatical and historical tools were

\textsuperscript{110} The term liberal theology is admittedly very broad, with many varied, even opposing understandings. The term is used in this dissertation as a type of rationalism. The term indicates a general approach to theology which freely utilizes several scientific and philosophical tools and techniques of interpreting the literature of Scripture without any deference to supernatural claims either within the text or regarding the text. The goal of liberal theology is, ideally, to apprehend the objective meaning of the literature of the Bible free from the influence of religious presuppositions.

employed to get at the world behind the text. Close examination of the history surrounding the text enabled scholars to reconstruct the environment of biblical authors and their audiences. Free from ecclesial constraint, both conservative and liberal scholars utilized the same analytical tools to study the Bible. However, they came to opposing conclusions regarding the credibility of the biblical text.

Critics within the Presbyterian Church and elsewhere called for conservatives to “face up” to the fact that several incidental errors were present in the Scriptures that did not affect the essence of Christian faith.112 Others flatly said the traditional faith had been proven baseless by literary analyses. Princeton’s resounding response was that the inerrancy of the biblical text was based on “evidences.”113 Princeton theologians employed the same scientific methods as liberals to demonstrate that the Bible “was a trustworthy record of the working of God among men.”114 The uptake of all this was that conservative Biblicists were forced into a single corner of defense; their particular form of inerrancy made the Bible become the only “bulwark” of Christianity, and science was its shield.115 However, if a single error were discovered in the text, it could spell disaster for the entire faith. To this reader, Princeton theologians accurately identified moments when historical critics were insufficiently critical of their own anti-supernaturalism; they argued that some of their scholarly criticisms were not purely objective. However, due to

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113 Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, 106.


Princeton’s high stress on propositional revelation, many of their most intense polemics were fixated on the inerrancy of Scripture. The traditional understanding of the Bible as God’s Word was buttressed by Princeton’s “almost impregnable apologetic” of biblical inerrancy.\textsuperscript{116}

In 1881, Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823–1886), son of Charles Hodge, published a defining article with B. B. Warfield on Princeton’s view of inspiration and inerrancy. The article, entitled “Inspiration,” set out the authors’ first principle of all Christian faith: the text of the Bible. For the younger Hodge and for Warfield, the text of the Bible was “the first religious truth which we embrace, upon which, subsequently, the entire fabric of true religion rests.”\textsuperscript{117} The Bible is “an infallible record” of God’s revelation, and “absolutely errorless.”\textsuperscript{118} For Princeton, inspiration was verbal; God had inspired the actual written words and the thoughts behind the selection of those words. Inspiration also had to be plenary; the text in its entirety was from God.\textsuperscript{119} Working under the assumption that each statement was inspired in this particular manner, the exegete researched the Bible in search of coherent verbal statements which addressed a plethora of topics. Although the Bible was not a science or history book, or a text on philosophy, it was accurate every time it referenced those subjects. The Princeton professors defended


\textsuperscript{118} Hodge and Warfield, “Inspiration,” 227.

\textsuperscript{119} Hodge and Warfield, “Inspiration,” 232.
their version of the doctrine of inerrancy as if the future of Christianity might depend on it. If the texts contained error, then the “objective ground of faith” was threatened.\textsuperscript{120}

Princeton’s doctrine of inerrancy rested on a rationalistic definition of truth.\textsuperscript{121} Perfect revelation, they pre-determined, was a Bible free from errors, contradictions, mysteries, paradoxes, and inconsistencies. It was a “prejudice”\textsuperscript{122} based on the “externally verified credibility of the apostles as teachers.”\textsuperscript{123} Neither miracles, nor a teaching Church, nor an inward witness\textsuperscript{124} were necessary warrants. Instead, the texts were considered inspired because they themselves made such a claim.\textsuperscript{125} This assertion was accepted as true based on the assumed trustworthiness of the apostles.\textsuperscript{126} If the apostles were trustworthy, then all they wrote was to be believed. The plenary text was assumed inerrant because the text was assumed inspired, and its authors were assumed to be trustworthy.

Princeton’s rational view of inspiration was very close to a theory of dictation. It assumed that Christian truth could only be understood in a non-paradoxical structure. Rationally, if the divine Spirit inspired the text, then the text cannot contain any

\textsuperscript{120} Hodge and Warfield, “Inspiration,” 241.
\textsuperscript{121} Sandeen, \textit{Roots of Fundamentalism}, 125, note 40.
\textsuperscript{122} Sandeen, \textit{Roots of Fundamentalism}, 118.
\textsuperscript{123} Sandeen, \textit{Roots of Fundamentalism}, 120.
\textsuperscript{124} Ironically, the Westminster Confession, which Princeton claimed to be in alignment with, called for more than a bare-naked text. For Westminster, the Spirit ultimately verified the veracity of Scripture. “Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.” “Westminster Confession,” Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, 1:5. http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/.
\textsuperscript{125} Cf. 2 Timothy 3:16.
\textsuperscript{126} Sandeen, \textit{Roots of Fundamentalism}, 121.
incongruence. “The heart of their position was the argument that God could not, would
not, convey truth through an errant document.”127 If God was truthful, then it was only
safe to conclude that his words were without defect. However, this assumption of what
divine truth looks like seems to have neglected that God’s revelation was most fully
found in frail human flesh.

Princeton’s rationalism was also illustrated in their recourse to lost original
documents. Warfield limited the extent of inerrancy to the original autographs; scribes
and copyists made errors transmitting the Bible from the original autographs, but those
first texts were flawless in all their testimony. On this point, fellow reformed theologian
Philip Schaff128 took Princeton theologians to task. Schaff argued from the Westminster
Confession that God had kept his word “pure in all ages.”129 For Schaff, Princeton’s
theologians were essentially saying that God originally provided an errorless document,
but he did not preserve it.130 Oddly, Warfield challenged skeptics to bring any argument


128 Schaff’s name is spelled Schaff and Schaf in various works. This dissertation will use Schaff throughout
text, but switch to Schaf when citing a title which maintains the shorter spelling.

129 Quoted in Sandeen, Roots of Fundamentalism, 129. In the Westminster Confession, the Scriptures,
“being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are

130 Schaff is striking an important point. Although Schaff claimed to regard Scripture as God’s perfect
written word, he detected that Princeton’s Biblicism risked substituting faith in God with faith in the Bible.
On one hand, Princeton’s recourse to original documents might be considered consistent with traditional
esteem for sacred Scripture. On the other hand, their concept of original documents was in some ways
foreign to the idea of Church as a living, organic, mystery of Christ’s Body. Augustine suffered through
many low quality Latin translations of Scripture, and he understood the value of original documents: “If we
are perplexed by an apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, The author of this book is
mistaken; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood.”
(Augustine, Contra Faustum Manichaeum in “Reply to Faustus the Manichaen” 11:5 NPNF-1, 4:180).
Augustine knew the value of examining “older tongues.” De Doctrina in Augustine, On Christian
said it is “most proper that Professors of Sacred Scripture and theologians should master those tongues in
which the sacred Books were originally written.” (Leo XIII, Providentissimus Deus. [Vatican website:
http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_1811193 Providentissimus-
which discredited the Scripture’s reliability. However, according to Warfield’s own stipulations, this was impossible. On one hand, he agreed that biblical scholars must be honest and turn up evidence gathered by critical investigation. He was open to such evidence because all scholars must admit any errors in the sacred text. On the other hand, he confined critical investigation to an impossible field of study. No one in the modern era had seen the original documents. Only discoveries pertaining to the original texts, which no one possessed, would be considered.\textsuperscript{131}

The doctrine of inerrancy, as taught by Hodge and Warfield, potentially created a “blind” spot for evangelical posterity; it was difficult for many to distinguish between lesser and “weightier matters\textsuperscript{132}” in the Bible. By basing the doctrine of inerrancy on the trustworthiness of biblical authors, Princeton ironically created an almost “limitless ability\textsuperscript{133}” to rationally justify any doctrine of one’s choosing. If a teaching could be demonstrated solely by propositional statements in the Bible, then it was to be believed with the same intensity as any teaching. The inspired quality of each statement made it binding. This possibly provides insight into why some of Princeton’s heirs became

deus.html[], 17). Christian exegetes have always sought to get back as close as possible to the original autographs. However, in the same chapter, Augustine reminded his readers where the canonical books came from: “The authority of these books has come down to us from the apostles through the successions of bishops and the extension of the Church.” (Augustine, Reply to Faustus 11:5, NPNF-1, 4:180). The Church was divinely mandated to safeguard the Scripture, and the Scriptures could not be understood outside of the Church. As Schaff and the Westminster Confession implied, the Christian can be confident of the reliability of the contemporary translations of Scripture even without original documents because God was present in his ecclesial temple.

\textsuperscript{131} Hodge and Warfield, “Inspiration,” 242. Also referenced in Sandeen, Roots of Fundamentalism, 129.

\textsuperscript{132} Matthew 23:23–24.

\textsuperscript{133} Sandeen, Roots of Fundamentalism, 121.
fundamentalist separatists. Polemics were often an exaggerated response to the slightest theological disagreement.

The Briggs Affair

Within the Presbyterian Church, Charles Augustus Briggs (1841–1913) was one of the most notable biblical scholars and theologians excommunicated for his views of Scripture. He and Princeton’s B. B. Warfield engaged in lengthy polemics over the integrity of the text of the Bible. Briggs was a Presbyterian pastor, and later the professor of Hebrew and Cognate Languages, and then Biblical Theology, at the prestigious Union Seminary in New York City, a Presbyterian institution. To the minds of Princeton and the Old School leadership within the Presbyterian Church, Briggs had succumbed to modernity in his critical analyses of the Bible.

After his appointment to Union in 1891, Briggs delivered his inaugural address, *The Authority of Holy Scripture*. Briggs’ message created uproar in the denomination, for he admitted “errors” in the sacred text. In his address, Briggs argued that God disclosed his presence to people by means of three pillars: the Church, Reason, and the Bible. All three of these pillars were fallible yet divine vehicles of revelation. All three were needed because they supported the inadequacy of the others. The interpreter of Scripture could not rely on the Bible alone. In another place, Briggs argued that the three were not necessarily coordinated. Such an assumption neglected the value of each particular resource.

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135 Charles A. Briggs, *The Bible, the Church and the Reason: The Three Great Fountains of Divine Authority* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1892; PDF e-book), 63.
Despite his affirmation of three pillars mediating the truth, Briggs’ prejudice came out early in his message. Certainly, for an “educated Protestant” it is “difficult, even impossible” to experience the authority of God within a church because of widespread ecclesiastical corruption. Yet, like little children blindly obeying their good parents, some do find God in the church.\textsuperscript{136} For Briggs, it appeared that some who were pitifully immature in their scholarship, thankfully still stumble, albeit naively, across some truth within ecclesiastical environs. Others have been able to find God through Reason, which included their consciences and religious feelings. Rising up from their created natures, they were mystically able to reflect on God without either Church or biblical text providing mediation. These rationalists, although they frequently rejected Church and Bible, found God enthroned in their own souls.\textsuperscript{137}

Briggs’ message was pointed towards the pitfalls associated with exclusive reliance on Scripture, the third pillar. The majority of Protestants, he argued, held to the Bible alone, consequently assailing Church and reason. Briggs acknowledged some people found God while reading the Bible. However, Briggs’ contention was that the exclusive treatment of the Scripture as the locus of God’s activity led to endless barriers of “traditional dogmatism” and “ecclesiasticism.” Biblicism added unjustified meanings to the text, thus obstructing access to God for others.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{136} Briggs, \textit{Authority of Holy Scripture}, 26.

\textsuperscript{137} Briggs, \textit{Authority of Holy Scripture}, 26–27.

\textsuperscript{138} Briggs, \textit{Authority of Holy Scripture}, 31.
For Briggs, one of the primary barriers to the interpretation of the Bible was the notion of “verbal inspiration.”\textsuperscript{139} Such an idea failed to see that the Scripture was written in human form with “errors in transmission” to which any piece of literature was subject. The view of verbal inspiration failed to see the enormous difference between text and meaning. For Briggs, the concepts, not the literal words, were divine in origin. In error, the text ascribed authorship to people, such as Moses or Paul, who did not really write some of the books, and told accounts that did not necessarily occur. Yet, the concepts behind the text were what lead people to encounter God.

Another significant barrier to the interpretation of the Bible was the doctrine of inerrancy of the sacred text. It was “not a pleasant task to point out errors in the sacred Scriptures,”\textsuperscript{140} but the task was necessary for Christians to grow up. To Briggs, neither Scripture nor Creeds sanctioned the doctrine of inerrancy. The authority of Scripture lay in its divine content, not human words purported to be infallible. It is especially noteworthy that these errors occurred in “circumstantial” sections of the Scriptures, not areas that dealt with “essentials.”\textsuperscript{141} Briggs thought it unwise to try to determine the extent of “providential superintendence.” People should not be forced to accept the claim that divine superintendence included “every particular” of the text. Briggs suggested leaving some of these questions alone.

For Briggs, higher criticism rendered service to believers by bringing them into the “Bible itself,” identifying superfluous elements, and retrieving its genuine contents.

\textsuperscript{139} Briggs, \textit{Authority of Holy Scripture}, 31.

\textsuperscript{140} Briggs, \textit{Authority of Holy Scripture}, 34.

\textsuperscript{141} Briggs, \textit{Authority of Holy Scripture}, 35–36.
Believers could be freed from superstitions surrounding the Scriptures, and liberated to understand their true meaning. Briggs asserted that the “inner substance of thought” in Scripture, its concept, is what higher critics could provide. These concepts could only be penetrated by “the language and the letter, the grammar and the style.” He promoted a rigorous, scholarly analysis of the text of Scripture, free from the encumbrances of religious faith. Scientific exegesis of the text of the Scriptures and their historical surroundings provided the surest footing for understanding what God was speaking.

Briggs was conservative in most of his theological positions, but his criticism of the literal text of the Bible was one of the first major steps towards a full blown modernist crisis within the Presbyterian Church. The Briggs affair tallied multiple heresy trials, and ended in his eventual excommunication from the Presbyterian Church. In addition to Briggs being removed from ministerial association with the Presbyterian Church, some of his opponents sought to have him relieved of teaching duties at Union. However, Union stood behind their professor and, with Briggs, departed the Presbyterian Church. Briggs continued to teach at Union, and was later ordained an Episcopalian priest in 1899.

A Warmer and More Practical Gospel

**Horace Bushnell**

Horace Bushnell (1802–1876) is significant to American theology because he is an emblematic transitional figure from a time when American Protestants were beginning

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143 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 38.
to find another way to authoritatively read and apply the Scriptures. Bushnell is illustrative of many nineteenth-century Protestants who were both suspicious of excesses in the revivals and dissatisfied with the rigidity of propositional theology. Dissatisfied with the available theological options, Bushnell began a theological move which gave greater emphasis to pragmatism and social development. In many ways, he was an antecedent of later American liberal theology; some called him the American Schleiermacher or Father of American liberalism.¹⁴⁴ Bushnell stood between the old orthodoxy and new interpretations of the faith. Yet, these labels can be deceptive because Bushnell would not have embraced the extreme direction in which some of his heirs took his thought.¹⁴⁵ He maintained several of the conservative confessions of his Puritan heritage throughout his life, while disavowing a legalistic enforcement of them. Having studied divinity at Yale prior to being ordained in a Congregational Church, Bushnell gave more emphasis to education than revelation and his interest in practical over dogmatic theology foreshadowed pragmatism. His ethics stressed interpersonal and social concerns, not orthodox law. He was neither a revivalist nor a high Church theologian. He was not an orthodox Calvinist, but he could not be classified as a Unitarian.¹⁴⁶

In his work, Christian Nurture, Bushnell critiqued excessive attention given to the revivallist “mode” of extending the kingdom of God through conversion. He performed his critique by casting the entire economy of salvation in the context of a family’s healthy nurturing of children. Without completely dismissing the value of someone coming “over

¹⁴⁴ Hewitt, Regeneration and Morality, 126.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
¹⁴⁶ Hewitt, Regeneration and Morality, 125.
to the side of faith and piety” in a revival, Bushnell was concerned that “the grand idea” which had “taken possession of the churches of our times” was that “they are going to convert the world.”¹⁴⁷ The emphasis on immediate reversal of one’s entire life and habits neglected God’s ancient “economy.” Since the Garden, a familial “reproduction” of character and grace in children was how God extended his kingdom.¹⁴⁸ Bushnell often referred to Paul’s use of “seed of Abraham” to argue that God’s children were birthed in a domestic context.¹⁴⁹ The idea of Christian nurture was “not a novelty, propounded” now for the “first time.” Instead, it is “as old as the Christian church.”¹⁵⁰ Citing the influence given to Timothy by his mother and grandmother,¹⁵¹ Bushnell argued that Christian nurture began prior to one’s birth;¹⁵² it was “physiologically” in one’s blood lines.¹⁵³ Bushnell complained that this biblical concept had been lost in the current revival fervor. “We can hardly find a place for any such thought.”¹⁵⁴ In response, Bushnell called for Christians to “restore” a “juster impression” of the great subject of


¹⁵¹ 2 Timothy 1:5.


¹⁵³ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 229. Throughout Part II, chapter 1 of this work, entitled “When and Where Nurture Begins,” Bushnell appears to argue that human dispositions precede one’s home environment and experiences; they are actually passed down in one’s blood lines. Although Bushnell’s point might seem odd, his over-arching emphasis is that one’s well-being is formed in his home. He is trying to argue that family is the center of Christian nurture.

salvation. For Bushnell, Christian salvation went beyond an instantaneous transformation of an individual. Redemption included the development of Christian character in a communal context, nurtured in a familial setting; genuine transformation occurred over time. No one knew the precise moment when a child came to full maturity; “the transition is gradual, and it will even be doubtful when it is passed.” In the same manner, Christian salvation was cheapened when too much emphasis was given to an instantaneous event. For Bushnell, people needed to understand the comprehensiveness of salvation; it was more than the conversion of a lost soul. A godly parent physically nurtured his child’s soul and body; therefore, it is “important” for the “religious life of the soul” to include the feeding of the body.” The revivals were insufficient because they only saw salvation as a spiritual event. In addition, Bushnell critiqued the anxious bench of revivalists. “Anxiety is a word of unbelief, or unreasoning dread,” and it “destroys the comfort of others.” Instead, Christian parents need to teach their children that “full faith in God” puts anxiety to rest. Bushnell understood that true conversion occurred in a nurturing environment, one free from unhealthy anxiety.

Although Bushnell was aggrieved over revivalism, he did not turn to dogmatic confession for relief. He argued that the basic “spirit and life” of Christian faith was lost in the speculative theology of the dogmatists. The fundamental danger of dogmatism

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159 Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 189.
was that it spoke scientifically on issues for which it had no certain knowledge. The depths of the person and work of Christ were beyond comprehension. Bushnell resisted overly-scientific explanations for what he believed.\footnote{Cf, for example, Horace Bushnell, \textit{Christ and His Salvation: In Sermons Variously Related Thereto} (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1864; PDF e-book), 10, 23, and 59. Bushnell writes on page 21, “Jesus, the everlasting Word, dwindles to a mere man.”} “What, in fact, do we prove but that, when we undertake to shape theologically the glorious mystery of salvation by Christ, we just as much reduce it, or whittle it down, as human thought is narrower and tinier than the grand subject matter attempted.”\footnote{Bushnell, \textit{Christ and His Salvation}, 21.} How could one speak with precision regarding that which was inexpressible? Bushnell argued that the gospel needed to be evoked in figural images, not dialectical propositions.\footnote{Hewitt, \textit{Regeneration and Morality}, 127–128.} It needed to be expressed in worship rather than minutely explained. If theology were placed in poetics, then they could evoke an embrace of what was beyond comprehension.

To Bushnell, scientific theologians attempted to “measure the sea with a spoon;”\footnote{Bushnell, \textit{Christ and His Salvation}, 19.} their works were “dogmas of a bigot age.”\footnote{Bushnell, \textit{Christ and His Salvation}, 20.} They had lost sight of the grandeur of God’s great salvation by teaching that God only wishes to save those whom he “predestinates,” or that Christ only died for a “particular part of humanity.” For these teachers, regeneration was wrought “by baptism,” repentance was reduced to “doing penance,” and the forgiveness of sins was a “priestly dispensation.”\footnote{Ibid.} Bushnell criticized
the “church-craft” of “ecclesiastics,” such as are in Rome, who “reduced the gospel” by adding “new ornaments and powers to it.”\(^{166}\) They are impostures who wrongly “give the church the prestige of a monarchy” instead of practically educating the character of its people.\(^{167}\) In addition, the systematic arrangements of theology in places like Princeton caused unnecessary dissension in the churches. The attempt at “anchoring” a person in the faith by submitting him to catechetical formulations actually encased his soul in “an opinion;” it shut him in and was “training him to be a sectarian before he is a Christian.” Bushnell called for a return to the less dogmatic and simple gospel found within the Nicene or Apostles Creed.\(^{168}\) The creeds were confessions of worship, not scientific explanations of the unknown. Bushnell critiqued the “New England teachers,” including the late Jonathan Edwards,\(^{169}\) who “for nearly a century” had taught penal substitution in Christ’s atonement.\(^{170}\) For Bushnell, the suffering of the innocent in the place of the guilty “shocks the most immoveable, and most nearly innate convictions of our moral nature.”\(^{171}\) Bushnell found it repugnant to suggest that God’s justice was so thirsty for suffering that it would not be satisfied until a victim’s blood was shed.\(^{172}\) Such “theological constructions” made it impossible to sympathetically understand the depth of

\(^{166}\) Bushnell, *Christ and His Salvation*, 19.

\(^{167}\) Ibid.


\(^{171}\) Ibid.

\(^{172}\) Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, 371.
Christ’s salvation. The suggestion that Christ was “punitively treated in his person” violated the subject matter and was “an offense to our most inborn convictions.”

Instead, Bushnell found poetic power in the “moral view” of atonement, which had been “in all ages” of the Church. The reconciliation wrought by Christ’s death was accomplished in the depths of his “character.” The suffering which Christ endured throughout his “life and ministry” was the “reconciling power” of God at work in him. Bushnell referenced Luke 22:44, where the Scripture says that Christ, in deep agony, sweat great drops of blood. Through this passage, Bushnell acknowledged that Christ brought salvation through his agony. However, Bushnell rejected “judicial chastening” found in traditional atonement theologies. The depth of Christ’s personal agony was a “mystery” for Bushnell, something that was “unrealizable” by “dogmatic solutions.” Dogmatism actually confounded rather than solved the mystery. For Bushnell, the mystery of salvation was something that was unknown, or “certainly” not able to be understood “on earth.” The several theories of atonement actually divided God’s people, rather than united them in awe of Christ.

Bushnell used the illustration of an overbearing parent to critique the dogmatic tendencies of ecclesiastics. Godly character within parents was a greater need than rigid rules. Didactic teaching was insufficient in itself to nurture a child in the Christian faith.

173 Bushnell, Christ and Salvation, 225–226.
174 Bushnell, The Vicarious Sacrifice, 14.
175 Ibid.
176 Bushnell, Christ and His Salvation, 230.
177 Bushnell, Christ and His Salvation, 225.
Parents needed to do more than command children to turn to Christ; they needed to possess “such qualities or qualifications as to be able to command.” Bushnell said the sin of some parents was they “command, govern, manage, punish, teach, and turn about the way of their child” “without any sacred qualifications” for themselves. He criticized parents who made a habit of petty commands and criticisms of their children. These parents, especially the fathers, “discourage” their children from true Christian piety. “It is a great discouragement to piety in children, when they are governed in a hard, unfeeling, way or in a manner of force and overbearing absolutism.”

Bushnell blamed dogmatists, such as those at Princeton, for the increased distaste for traditional faith in American society. Their rigidity had pushed many people away. Bushnell asserted that a mystical awareness must return to the Christian faith. Dogmatism needed to be chastened, not completely discarded. Some in Bushnell’s day were trying to form a “new Christianity, the more liberal, advanced belief” which was free from dogma. For Bushnell, this new Christianity reduced everything to nature, where “all the flaming glories of the gospel are stifled as extravagances.” For Bushnell, such liberalism had no salvation. He rejected the reduction of all things to nature; the grace of God was supernatural, and it gradually worked God’s salvation in society. “True, there is no grace that will suddenly make us perfect; but there is a grace that will take away all conscious

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sinning,” eventually “raising us above the dominating power of sin.”

On this point, Princeton’s Charles Hodge possibly misunderstood Bushnell.

Hodge complimented Bushnell for his *Discourses on Christian Nurture* as “organic” and “distinguished,” very much in the “Old School” cast. Hodge appreciated Bushnell’s critique of revivalism. However, Hodge criticized Bushnell’s lack of the supernatural in human salvation. According to Hodge, Bushnell’s view of redemption did not take depravity seriously enough; salvation was an ordinary result of natural causes.

While rejecting the emotional emphasis of the revivals, Hodge contended that salvation still needed to be an instantaneous, supernatural event. Bushnell rejoined by accusing Hodge of the same individualism of the revivalists. In retrospect, Bushnell did not abandon the idea of supernatural intervention in redemption as Hodge feared; instead, he deemphasized its instantaneous aspect in personal Christian development. Bushnell heightened the value of character development in the community of faith. The conservative Calvinists within the Congregational denomination were livid with Bushnell’s theology because he was open to integrating aspects of Arminianism into Calvinism; he had compromised his dogmatics. They pressed for a heresy trial for many years. Bushnell’s local Congregational government refused to indict him and shielded him from their formal assaults. Bushnell’s works significantly influenced many American

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theologians, and help propel a liberal movement that demystified more than Bushnell had envisioned. One of the theologians particularly influenced by Bushnell, but who went beyond him, was Walter Rauschenbusch.

**Walter Rauschenbusch**

Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918), from Rochester Seminary, helped shape the Social Gospel movement in America. Rauschenbusch had studied in America and Europe. He drew on Bushnell’s works and those of German scholars Adolf von Harnack and Albrecht Ritschl. Rauschenbush’s work deemphasized the mystical aspects of Christianity even further than Bushnell did. He championed the practical manifestation of the Kingdom of God.

For Rauschenbusch, modern Christian theology was perverted in almost all of its forms. Therefore, a prophetic call was needed to return to primitive Christianity. In his mind, the social gospel was that prophetic summons; it denounced the “ceremonial performances” of organized religion and called Christians back to “original purity,” “absolute spirituality,” a faith that was “almost wholly emancipated from ceremonial elements, insisting simply on right relations to men as the true expression of religion.” The ancient gospel of the “primitive” church was originally focused on ethical treatment of one’s fellow as the primary concern of religion. Rauschenbusch saw the life of Jesus as

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188 Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 53.
the “highest perfection” of the “historical evolution of religion.” Ancient Christianity was originally a “great revolutionary movement” armed with a “pledge to change the world,” not to strive to live in another sphere. However, after Jesus, “Christianity quickly dropped back to the pre-Christian stage.” After Christ, “ceremonial actions and orthodox beliefs became indispensable to salvation.” “When the inspirationism of the primitive church died out, the understanding of its nature grew artificial.” The realization of the Church’s “charismatic” life faded from memory. Christianity had “lost its power of moral transformation” because it “turned its deepest interest from ethical conduct to sacramental ritual.” Contrary to common teaching in the churches, the rite of baptism was not originally intended to be a “ritual” related to personal salvation. Instead, it was properly understood as a “dedication to a religious and social movement.” Over time, Christian ceremonies of Baptism and Eucharist became superstitious and magical, and lost sight of the gospel’s ethical imperative.

Rauschenbusch blamed medieval theology, especially the “teaching authority” of the Church, for the increase of superstition within Christianity. The hierarchical Church had “systematized and reinforced” practices which were irrational. These included the sign of the cross, prayers, and “naming of holy names.” The “Papacy” was a “haughty,
luxurious, domineering” “international hierarchy” which obstructed a “freer religion.”

Just as ancient, backslidden Israel’s leaders resisted the prophets, so modern “religions of authority” resisted the prophets, like Rauschenbusch, who railed against systemic evils. The modern ecclesiastical hierarchy used the sayings of old prophets to “furnish a supernatural basis” for its old doctrines.

Rauschenbusch also decried lower church theological movements within Protestantism. The dogmatics of both orthodox and revivalist evangelicals focused on individual salvation, to the neglect of the primitive revolutionary intentions of Jesus. The weakness with the “individualistic gospel” was that it did not “evoke faith in the will and power of God” to transform permanent institutions of society. Its focus on individual sins failed to address the deeper problems in society. The “old theological system” was “puny and inadequate” in the face of societal needs. It was a “dumb-bell system of thought.”

According to Rauschenbusch, an integrated theology of individual and societal salvation was needed. “Religion wants wholeness of life.” Personal salvation certainly included the entrance of an individual spirit “into voluntary obedience to God,” whence it “feels the higher freedom” of Christ. However, personal salvation was insufficient if it

196 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 89.
197 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 195.
198 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 5.
199 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 6.
200 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 9.
201 Ibid.
202 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 195.
did not engage one’s society. “Complete salvation” involved the free coordination of one’s personal life with “the life of his fellowship in obedience to the loving impulses of the spirit of God.” True Christian salvation “must turn from a life centered on ourselves toward a life going out toward God and men.”

Rauschenbusch referenced Jesus’ critique of the Pharisees traversing sea and land to make a single proselyte, only to have him become a ghastlier child of hell, to say that revival religion might even make people worse. Referencing the revivals of D. L. Moody, Rauschenbusch warned that an emphasis on personal salvation only produced “skin-deep changes.”

Rauschenbusch intentionally demystified his theology. The social gospel was practical, and it contained nothing that would “breed or reinforce superstition.” Its focus was on “ethical righteousness.” Sin, for example, was not a supernatural flaw inherited from one’s progenitors. Instead, following Schleiermacher, Rauschenbusch argued that sin was a defect common to all. It was “essentially selfishness.” Only social salvation could address the universal human flaw, and restore communal righteousness. Righteousness must be organized because salvation was more comprehensive than mere personal liberation. Rauschenbusch did not completely dismiss the need for personal forgiveness of sins; social salvation included personal forgiveness.

203 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 198.
204 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 98.
205 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 97.
206 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 15.
207 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 47, 50.
However, the doctrine of a vicarious atonement of Christ was “rigid” and too individualistic.

Rauschenbusch admitted that the death of Christ was central to Paul’s theology. However, he argued that the “early church never appropriated or utilized more than a few” of Paul’s ideas. How, then did Rauschenbusch think Jesus bore humanity’s sins? For Rauschenbusch, it was not by imputation because personal guilt and merit “cannot be transferred from one person to another.” Instead, Jesus bore human sin with an “unparalleled sense of human solidarity.” 208 He “generalized his personal experiences” and made them significant for everyone. Jesus did not pay a penalty for peoples’ particular sins, but he bore the “weight of public sins of organized society” 209 through his suffering. And, those public sins which Jesus bore were “casually connected” with all private sins. Rauschenbusch outright denied the Church dogma on atonement.

Rauschenbusch saw himself as in the middle of the theological spectrum. To his own mind, he was prophetically restoring the “primitive gospel” through his work. On one hand, the social gospel was more religious than the “orthodox type” because it emphasized the primitive idea of ethics. On the other hand, it was more positive than the “liberal type” because it emphasized action. For Rauschenbusch, the social gospel was the “old message of salvation, but enlarged and intensified.” 210

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208 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 246.
209 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 247.
210 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 5.
Summary

To this reader, the two expressions of liberalism surveyed in this chapter benefitted biblical studies by providing a larger understanding of the biblical text. However, their liability was that they were often narrow-minded.

Historical criticism, in its various forms, attempted to begin with the text of the Bible. Through scientific investigation, which was assumed to be unbiased, it sought to get at the world behind the text. Historical criticism was able to illuminate the original meaning of particular texts, as well as detect redactions in the Bible. In addition, efforts to reconstruct the historical setting of the text uncovered the influence of other world literature on Scripture. The value of these efforts was inestimable towards trying to reconstruct the world of the text. Although some critical conclusions were viewed as sinister by those who held traditional confessions, the scholarship displayed an unashamed openness to understanding the raw text of Scripture. Bushnell, Rauschenbusch, and other socially-minded theologians highlighted the neglected aspect of charity in the Christian gospel, as well as the communal aspect of salvation. The gospel was the life force of Christianity, and it could not be reduced to Princeton’s principles abstracted from propositional revelation. Nor could it be cheapened by shallow, quick conversions. In addition, these theologians attempted to redirect evangelical attention away from narcissistic concerns to broader societal needs. The affairs of this world, located in real history, mattered.

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211 Cf. James 1:27.

Despite liberal theologians’ positive impact on exegesis, they appeared closed-minded at crucial moments. Many biasedly assumed the impossibility of the supernatural in the world of the text. At the same time, they presumed their own impartiality. By closing themselves off to the role of faith in exegesis, they limited their reach. In addition, by claiming traditional dogma, such as Christ’s Atonement, to be the remnants of a “bigot age,” some demonstrated a lack of openness to the fullness of Christian theology. Others simply ignored what was clearly written in the New Testament. Their own prejudices hamstrung their scholarly efforts. Bushnell and Rauschenbusch minimized, and even rejected, dogmatic elements of Christianity; but, they did not realize they were disfiguring the faith in the process. From this perspective, a lack of ecclesiology was near the root of the problem. It was difficult for apparently disputing theologies to co-habit without a common home.

**Mercersburg Theology**

During the 1840s and 1850s, John Williamson Nevin (1803–1886) and Phillip Schaff (1819–1893) led a significant attempt to reform Protestant theology at the small German Reformed seminary in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. Mercersburg’s theology is especially relevant to this dissertation because of its attempt to import elements of Catholic teaching into American Protestantism, creating what some called Reformed or Evangelical Catholicism. Mercersburg’s theologians were some of the only Americans to assert that evangelical theology needed both a mystical Church and the Roman Catholic Church. For them, genuine reform required a robust ecclesiology.

Both Nevin and Shaff came into the German Reformed Church from outside the denomination, “bringing with them broad perspectives, interdenominational friendships,
and a passion for ecumenical unity.” Nevin was raised Scots-Irish Presbyterian and trained at Princeton. Although he was initially supportive of Old School Presbyterianism, his “enthusiasm” for contemporary German thinking was part of the reason the German Reformed Church called him to Mercersburg. Schaff, Swiss by birth and trained in Europe, was a product of the Lutheran Awakening that occurred throughout Europe in the early years of the nineteenth century. Although Mercersburg was not located in New York, Philadelphia, or Boston, its seminary “may have had wider horizons than any other center of American theology in its time.” The polarizing debates surrounding revivalism and biblical criticism were dominating the religious landscape at the time. Nevin and Schaff saw no lasting value in popular revivalism, or in the diminished supernaturalism of Bushnell. Further, Princeton’s scientific exegesis neglected the living history of the Christian Church. The result of sola scriptura in America had been disastrous. American Protestantism needed reform.

Christocentric Theology

In “Theology of the New Liturgy,” an article written shortly after the Civil War, Nevin reflected on Mercersburg’s theology as an attempt to apprehend theology’s

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“nature,” its “interior character and constitution.” Nevin and others were convinced that American theology was too provincial, focusing on “one or two points of theological opinion” while neglecting the “universal view.” As a remedy, Nevin laid out three areas where Mercersburg’s theology attempted to reform American Protestantism.

First, theology needed to be Christological. Nevin and Schaff’s theology, unlike most American evangelical thought, was Christocentric and sacramental. “Christ himself” was present in the Christian faith. “The religion which he brought into the world was not merely given by him; it was in him, and remains in him still, as its living fountain.” All doctrines and promises must revolve around Christ, not the text of Scripture. All dogmatic “concepts gather themselves up into Him ultimately as their root.” Practically, this meant that all interpretation of Scripture was governed by the faith that Christ provided the full meaning of the text. For Nevin, each act of exegesis must “pass through the mystery of the Incarnation” and stand “perpetually in the presence and power of that fact.” Theology’s “facts and forms are not enough;” they must be interpreted from a view of the whole, which was only gained with a Christocentric lens.

Christ’s person, not the text of the Bible, was the first principle of theology at

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223 Ibid.

Mercersburg. Each particular tile was analyzed under the presumption that it contributed to the living mosaic of Jesus Christ.

Second, theology needed to be “ruled by the Apostles Creed.” Nevin’s point here was that the Creed provided the comprehensive view of the faith. The interpreter of Scripture must start from the whole view of Christian faith prior to asserting the meaning of select sacred passages. For Nevin, it was this comprehensive vision of the Creed that contained the power to reform the Church. Although the words of the Creed were not strictly composed by the Apostles, it was a “common rule of faith, or canon of truth, which the Universal Church held from the beginning.” In another place, Nevin said that the Bible needed to be interpreted within the “orbit of the creed,” from within the communion of the Church. “The Bible, to be a true word of Christ, must be ruled by the life of the Church.”

Throughout his career, Nevin resisted Princeton’s reduction of theology to a “science” because that method focused on parts of Scripture to the neglect of the “whole history of Christian revelation.” Purely inductive approaches to exegesis also resulted in ecclesiastical division. All of the various sects claimed a supreme “regard for the Bible,” but this did little to maintain unity in the faith. “It sounds well to lay so much

225 Ibid., pp 33–35.
227 Nevin, “New Liturgy,” 34.
229 Ullmann, as quoted by Nevin in Nevin, Mystical Presence, 21–22.
230 Nevin, John, “Antichrist and the Sect System” (1848 sermon), quoted in Nichols, Mercersburg Theology, 95.
stress on the authority of the Bible as the only textbook and guide for Christianity. But what are we to think of it when we find such a motley mass of protesting systems.”231 Nevin cited numerous contemporary examples within the Congregationalist, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian denominations to argue that the “breaking of church communion” occurred at the hands of those who claimed the “exclusive authority of the Scriptures.”232

Third, theology needed to be “objective and historical.” God had objectively revealed himself in time; therefore, the history of revelation needed to be examined before the “subjective or experimental”233 was explored. This point sought to avoid excessive individualism. Theology could not be reduced to a system of “subjective notions” “born only of the human mind.” God was not a magician who exclusively spoke to individual souls “as enthusiasts and fanatics fondly dream.”234 The veracity of Christianity went beyond cold rationalism, with its abstract thought and “metaphysical theory of God and religion.”235 Nevin admitted that, according to his faith, indeed “the gospel is supernatural; but it is the supernatural joined in a new order of existence to the natural; and this, it can only be in the form of history.”236

231 Nevin, “Antichrist,” in Nichols, Mercersburg Theology, 97.

232 Ibid.


234 Ibid.

235 Ibid.

For Nevin, the Incarnation, that “great fact” which occurred in “natural history,” was where objective research of divine revelation must start. On this point, the significance of the Creed came into play. For Nevin, the Creed confessed the “whole significance” of the “Divine deed” of Christ’s Incarnation, “whereby God manifested himself in the flesh.” However, the Church was examined “next” as the ongoing “historical character of Christianity.” For Nevin, the gospel’s “supernatural economy” in its “perennial force” needed to be surveyed; it was insufficient to only have “memories” of God’s revelation in Christ. The “carrying out of this mystery of godliness among men,” and the “new order of existence that was constituted for the world by the great fact of the Incarnation” must be investigated. This field of study was the “objective, historical form” of the “Holy Catholic Church as we have it in the Creed.” Nevin claimed that “the supernatural, as thus made permanent and historical in the Church, must, in the nature of the case, correspond with the form of the supernatural, as it appeared originally in Christ himself.”

Ecclesiology

For Mercersburg’s theologians, the Christian Church was sacramental. God had continually revealed himself in both the natural body of Christ and the ecclesial body of

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238 Ibid.
239 Ibid.
243 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 214.
his Church. The Church was not merely a human construct, nor should it be considered an obstacle to theology. Rather, as an ongoing manifestation, it was an essential “medium of communication between Christ and his people.”

God’s salvific grace was found in the Church in ways it was not present in the world. To Mercersburg’s theologians, the idea of an invisible Church tragically restricted the objective nature of the Incarnation to “memories only of what was once such a real presence in the world.” Such a view disregarded the organic constitution of the gospel. Furthermore, to present God’s revelation in ahistorical terms was insensitive to the increasing self-consciousness of the modern generation. The history of the Church needed to be studied in order to understand God’s revelation in Christ.

Mercersburg’s sacramental ecclesiology led them to reconsider the presence of the Roman Catholic Church in human history. On one hand, Nevin and Schaff rejected outright several Catholic doctrines and placed the Catholic Church in a light that would be unacceptable to a practicing Catholic. For Nevin, the ecclesiology which was “held by Rome and also by Oxford” was a “terrible error.” For Schaff, its “central sin” was “creature deification.” By “making itself identical with the universal church,” the Catholic Church excluded the necessary development of Protestantism. For Schaff, a significant problem with Catholic doctrine was that its “predominant spirit” was

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244 Nevin, “New Liturgy,” 43.


246 Nichols, Mercersburg’s Theology, 18.


248 Schaff, Principle of Protestantism, 76.
“legal.”

On the other hand, Mercersburg’s theologians affirmed the “legitimate” and “divinely appointed” role of the Catholic Church. As part of the Church Militant, the Catholic Church “has error along with the truth;” she “bears golden treasures in earthen vessels.”

The “error itself contains a truth,” and “the truth will never disappear from her communion.” The truth may be “obscured,” but “never absolutely lost.” For Schaff, it was “unhistorical and unchurchly altogether” for evangelicals to reject the Catholic Church. Such a view was either “conscious” or “unconscious” “treason.”

Christ had promised to “build his church on a rock” and perpetually guide it. Schaff noted that Paul referenced the Church as the “pillar and ground of truth.” For Schaff, the Catholic Church was “the legitimate bearer of the Christian faith and life;” it was a “divinely appointed preparatory institute.”

In his 1849 article, False Protestantism, written for the Mercersburg Review, Nevin cautioned his fellow Protestants that “the loss of the pope is not necessarily, in and of itself, the gain of Christ.”

The “worst” kind of

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250 Schaff, Principle of Protestantism, 47.
251 Schaff, Principle of Protestantism, 77.
252 Nevin, introduction to Schaff’s Principle of Protestantism, 12.
254 Ibid.
256 Mt 16:18; 28:20, and 1 Timothy 3:15. Schaff’s application of these passages demonstrated the interpretive possibilities gained by ecclesiology. For Schaff, the one who denied the on-going presence of Christ in the actual structure of the Church could not interpret his promise, “Lo, I am with you always,” to apply to anything but a guarantee toward personal assurance. Schaff was able to apply these passages to the objective, visible churches of his day.
257 Schaff, Principle of Protestantism, 47.
zeal for Protestants was to blindly support an opinion or action simply because it opposed Rome.

Within the framework of Hegelian dialectic, Schaff argued that the Roman Catholic Church had been the legitimate bearer of Christian life and faith. However, during its ancient and medieval form, the Catholic Church was “pressed with the inward necessary impulse towards Protestantism.”259 Chronologically, the Catholic Church was the thesis; the Reformation was the antithesis; the future ecumenical union, which Mercersburg was participating in, would be the synthesis. In this outline, a denial of the Catholic Church’s legitimacy would have jeopardized the validity of Protestantism.

It was wrong, in Schaff’s mind, to think that the Reformation was a break with the Catholic Church. “Thousands” of Protestants misunderstand the Reformation by “separating it from all right relation to the time that went before.”260 Instead of being a break, Protestantism was an organic development from the ancient and medieval Catholic Church.261 The Reformation was not to be “regarded as a revolutionary separation from the Catholic Church, holding connection at best with some factionary sect of the Middle Ages.”262 Sadly, for Schaff, many of his fellows “renounce the wealth of the Middle Ages” and forget the Lord’s promise to be with his Church until the end of the age.263 For

259 Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, 118–119.
261 Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, 117.
Schaff, the Protestant Reformation was “an absolute historic necessity.”\textsuperscript{264} The Reformation served the Catholic Church by the attempt at “raising it” to a “new and higher form.”\textsuperscript{265} As an example, the sixteenth-century Reformed doctrine of justification and other soteriological tenets had not yet been addressed by general councils. The Church developed these doctrines over time, and the Reformation helped finally articulate the mature teachings. Schaff likened the relationship between Catholicism and Protestantism to the relationship of Law and Gospel.\textsuperscript{266} Protestantism did not destroy Catholicism; by design, it perfected Catholicism.

For Schaff, the final synthesis between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism was beginning to occur, and one day the ideal fusion would be realized. Therefore, it was the “duty” of all Christians to seek reconciliation and “unity”\textsuperscript{267} despite the current disease of sectarianism. “All these storms that gather in the horizon, will but serve fully to purify the atmosphere.”\textsuperscript{268} The “mighty advances of the Romish Church” will “compel the Protestants to take another position,”\textsuperscript{269} resulting in ecumenical unity. The “consummation” of both Catholicism and Protestantism will be “at the same time their union.”\textsuperscript{270} “Why should we despair of another Reformation?”\textsuperscript{271} In a manner similar to

\textsuperscript{264} Schaff, \textit{Principle of Protestantism}, 47.
\textsuperscript{265} Schaff, \textit{Principle of Protestantism}, 35.
\textsuperscript{266} Cf, Schaff, \textit{Principle of Protestantism}, 38, 47. The proposition is throughout his work.
\textsuperscript{267} Schaff, \textit{Principle of Protestantism}, 204.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid.
late nineteenth-century Russian author Vladimir Solovyov, Schaff used the apostles Peter, Paul, and John to represent the three stages of Christianity. Peter represented the Catholic stage, Paul the Protestant stage, and John the final unity. The “great task,” in the eyes of Mercersburg’s theologians, was both ecumenical and theological; it was “bringing Christianity to its last universal form.” Mercersburg saw itself as a catalyst of the final synthesis.

The theologians’ warmness towards Rome was too much for their Protestant peers to accept. Schaff’s “Principle of Protestantism” immediately met disapproval in America, leading to a heresy trial before his new denomination in York, Pennsylvania, in 1845. Schaff was accused of exalting Tradition over Scripture, and secretly trying to bring Christians back to the shackles of the Roman Church. Schaff was not convicted, but the suspicions and verbal polemics continued to hound him. The American revivalists, whom Nevin sarcastically called Puritans, feared that any “churchly, priestly, sacramental”

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274 Schaff’s use of the Hegelian dialectic was distinct from Ferdinand Christian Baur’s use of it. Baur was Schaff’s former professor at Tübingen. Baur taught that the Reformation was the great watershed for understanding the whole of Christian history. The Christian faith was the religion of uninhibited unity of God and humanity in the person of Christ. The ancient church’s thesis was to unify the church in dogma. The medieval church sought to institutionalize the faith in organized structure, providing the antithesis. The movement of Christianity during these two phases was towards the objectification of the idea of Christianity. The Reformation thus brought the synthesis: subjective autonomy and liberty from “clerical control” (Nichols, *Romanticism in American Theology*, 120–121). For Baur, the liberty of the Reformation began with emancipation from papal regulation; however, it naturally progressed into freedom from dogma and even Scripture itself. Unlike Baur and other Protestants of their day, Schaff and Nevin did not demystify the Church.
element was identical to the “abomination of Romanism itself.”\(^{275}\) Mercersburg’s German Reformed denomination had accepted the wildfire revivals positively, which left the denomination’s leadership uneasy with Nevin and Schaff’s criticism of heart-felt religion. American Protestants were anxious over suspected Catholic infiltration, and shunned nearly any semblance of a sacramental faith. The American theological mind could not handle a mystical ecclesiology.

Interpretation of Scripture

Mercersburg’s theology elevated the role of Tradition in the interpretation of Scripture. For them, biblical theology was incomplete without studying the “real supernatural constitution unfolding itself historically in the world.” An exegesis which elevated detached systematic propositions as its goal, neglected Christ’s “permanent order of life.”\(^{276}\) Christianity’s truth could not be reduced to propositions derived from a scientific analysis of a closed text, developed without regard to the dynamism of history, and the Spirit moving within that history. The very conception of Christianity is that its “supernatural economy should be of perennial force;” its resources and powers of salvation, if they were indeed for all ages, must be ever present in an objective and historical manifestation. For Nevin, the Church, “standing in the middle” of the Apostles’ Creed, was the “objective, historical movement of the grace” manifested in Christ.


\(^{276}\) Nevin, *Mystical Theology*, 131.
Theology, then, must be “at once sacramental.”277 “The theology we are speaking of, then, is churchly.”278

For Mercersburg Seminary’s theologians, the Scriptures must be read with an ecclesial consciousness. Following Schleiermacher and Tübingen’s Johann Adam Möhler, Schaff taught that Tradition was more than the “objective aggregate of beliefs” and practices arbitrarily handed down.279 Tradition was also the subjective and common apprehension of the Church. Reading a pure Bible was neither possible nor desirable. Biblical exegesis void of Tradition, as “held by many, particularly in our own time,” is beset by “insuperable difficulties.” Biblicism possessed an “isolated character” and brought a “lifeless void of eighteen centuries between its completion and the present time.”280 It neglected the reality that the Church was the definite object of the Spirit’s activity in the world. In addition, the very existence of multiple sects demonstrated that those who “dismiss tradition in favor of Scripture” were nonetheless reading it through their own denomination’s customs. Biblical exegesis needed to occur within the range of creedal confession. Nevin acknowledged that traditions had been misused, but he understood they still expressed “deep and sacred truth.”281

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277 Nevin, The New Liturgy, 43.
278 Nevin, The New Liturgy, 42.
279 Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, 171.
280 Schaff, Principle of Protestantism, 90.
281 Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, 186.
Both Nevin and Schaff argued that the Church needed to be ruled by the Bible; Scripture was primary. Schaff “conceded” that Church and Tradition preceded the New Testament; apostolic testimony existed in the Church prior to the writing of the gospel. However, Tradition alone could not preserve the “purity and simplicity” of the “Christian doctrine,” as if it were a self-sufficient testimony. For Nevin, the Bible was the living flow of the Spirit that had been continuously poured into the Church throughout all ages, conditioning its life. Nevin saw the Bible as “supreme” in relation to Tradition, which left room for private judgment within the parameters of creedal confession.

Schaff complained that the Catholic Church had as “its object” to “subordinate” the Bible to Tradition, and then to make the Church “the infallible judge of both.” Although several Catholic traditions were neither explicitly demonstrated in Scripture nor had received universal acceptance, the Catholic Church nonetheless insisted on the importance of those traditions. Schaff noted that very many Catholic dogmas rose in the middle ages after Augustine. In Schaff’s estimation, Catholics thought Tradition “springs in part from Christ himself, and in part from the Apostles under the guidance of

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285 Ibid.
286 Schaff, _Principle of Protestantism_, 74.
287 Schaff, _Principle of Protestantism_, 75. Some of the extra traditions included “infant baptism, the worship of saints, the doctrine of purgatory, the sacrifice of the mass, the forty days fast before Easter.”
288 Ibid.
the Holy Spirit.” For Schaff, Tradition was “regenerated reason, the Christian consciousness of the Church; which stands not beside the Scriptures as an independent fountain, but is simply the streams of their contents reaching to us through the life of the Church, embracing always only what is contained in the Scriptures themselves.”

Mercersburg theology placed the Bible in a derived and correlative position. Nevin acknowledged that Church and Tradition could be exalted to such a height as to “put Christ in the shade,” but so could the Bible. Although the former was a weakness of Catholics, the latter was the hazard of American Protestantism. “Blind outward authority, and mere private judgment are alike insufficient as a key to the Bible.” A hermeneutical circle of Scripture, Tradition, and private illumination was needed to govern the right interpretation of the Bible. “Will it be said that this is a circle? Be it so!” For Nevin, both Scripture and Tradition were siblings, sprung from Christ’s one

289 Schaff, Principle of Protestantism, 74. As a helpful reminder, Schaff was a century away from Vatican II declaring that “sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture” flow “from the same divine wellspring.” (DV 9, in Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Hünermann, Enchiridion Symbolorum: Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals, ed. Robert L. Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012], 4212: 922). The Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council had “left unresolved” the relation between Tradition and Scripture. During the nineteenth century, some Catholics indeed considered Scripture and Tradition to be distinct sources of revelation. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (Since 1700), vol. 5 of The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 328. Debate continued on the topic within Catholic circles up until Vatican II. Schaff may have misunderstood Catholic teaching, or he may have been taught from Catholics in his day that held to a two-source theory of revelation. It was at Vatican II that the Catholic Church formally stressed that there were not two sources of revelation. Instead, all revelation flowed from a single divine source and tended toward “the same end.”


presence in the Church. The Church was “the living revelation” of God, and the Bible his
written word. They both ever “do homage to Christ” by virtue of their “nature.”
“Creed and New Testament were coordinate, independent testimonies and vehicles of the same
revelation.” Regardless of distinctions between them, both of Mercersburg Seminary’s
primary theologians argued for the theological role of ecclesiastical tradition in exegesis.
Biblical exegetes needed Church Tradition because “without a continuous tradition” all
“higher sense for the Scriptures would fail us.”

Mercersburg theologians insisted on an ecclesiastical hermeneutic in their polemics on
soteriology. Although Nevin agreed with Bushnell’s critique of the “ostentatious methods
of promoting religion” in Finney’s revivals, the incompleteness of Bushnell’s own
document of moral atonement, as well as Hodge’s shallow teaching on forensic
justification, alarmed him.

Soteriology

John Nevin was troubled that German Reformed churches were increasingly
interested in revivalism, even though the movement had brought division into his

296 Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, 188.
298 John Williamson Nevin. The Anxious Bench. (Chambersburg, PA: Printed at the Office of the “Weekly
299 Part of the reason for the openness to revivals within the German Reformed Church may have been their
Pennsylvania German pietistic roots. For example, John Winebrenner (1797–1860) left the German
Reformed Church in 1825 and started Union Bethel Church in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Winebrenner’s
revivalist methods, similar to Finney’s, caused controversy among Calvinists in the German Reformed
Church, and were part of the reason he left the denomination. He later formed the denomination known
of Evangelicalism (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 753.
denomination. He did not reject all the effects of revivals, but he had little patience for them. He admitted that “some” people were “converted in fact” at the revivals, but the “general operation” of the system remained “intrinsically and permanently bad.” The revivalists’ sales methods and undue pressuring of people were shallow substitutions for genuine spiritual care. People were being coerced to do what only God could accomplish; pressurized sales gimmicks were used to convert souls. In his work, The Anxious Bench, Nevin said the revivalist techniques were “quackery,” within the reach of “fanaticism and error.” They procured quick conversions, but little substantial change. Even earlier revivalists “Whitefield and Edwards needed no new measures” to move people, unlike the modern “quacks.” Nevin laid bare the need for a “different system altogether” in order to build up the people of God. To him, catechesis within a living and structured Church provided a firmer alternative to the “shallow and fleeting experience” of revivalism. Unfortunately, “the spirit of the anxious bench was at war with the spirit of Catechism.”

Nevin applauded Bushnell for teaching that Christ’s death brought “a higher moral sense in mankind,” and produced “a more appalling conviction of their guilt, or

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300 Nichols, Mercersburg Theology. 8. For example, the United Brethren in Christ and the Church of God were both revivalist secessions away from the German Reformed Church.

301 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 15.

302 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 19.

303 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 23.

304 Hewitt, Regeneration and Morality, 95; and Nevin Anxious Bench, 55–56.

305 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 56.
guiltiness, before God.”

However, in Nevin’s estimation, Bushnell failed to articulate a sacramental understanding of salvation. Bushnell’s theology did not allow the Church to convey grace, especially in its sacraments. To Nevin, Bushnell was correct in asserting that revivals did not result in genuine regeneration and Christian morality. However, Bushnell was incorrect in suggesting that Christian character was primarily achieved by natural processes. According to Bushnell, God used the death of Christ to raise the moral consciousness of his people; God used natural means and mental processes, not Nevin’s superstitious appropriation of sacraments, to develop inner human integrity.

Nevin was dissatisfied with the “whole” method of moral atonement because it remained “something external to the subject of salvation itself.” For Nevin, mere “appeals addressed to the understanding and will” in the “process of education” are only “outward” persuasions. Nevin complained that in Bushnell’s thinking, Christ was “gazed upon and admired” as being outside of one’s self, but he never constitutively or directly influenced the soul. For Nevin, personal salvation needed to result in a new life, not just a reoriented life. Salvation occurred “by an inward living union with Christ.”

The mystical union between the believer and Christ was more than following the example of

306 Bushnell, Christ and his Salvation, 117.

307 Hewitt, Regeneration and Morality, 135.

308 Hewitt, Regeneration and Morality, 154.

309 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 165.

310 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 165.

311 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 165.

312 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 166.

313 In Hewitt, Regeneration and Morality, 96.
Jesus; salvation was a new life resulting from the actual entrance of the real Christ. In partaking of Holy Communion, one encountered the real presence of Jesus Christ. Communion is a “participation of the Savior’s life.” Nevin contended that if he could not partake in what he gazed upon, then “I am left to starve and perish spiritually in the midst of a merely moral and rationalistic redemption.” Bushnell’s Christian nurture had muted the supernatural and forgot that “Christianity is redemption and atonement.”

Nevin judged Princeton’s teaching on imputation to be “higher and more orthodox” than moral theories of atonement. In Princeton’s system, the believer personally participated in Christ’s redemption by faith, and he was legally reckoned righteous before God. Supernaturally, God, “in virtue of the terms of the New Covenant,” transferred Christ’s righteousness and multiplied benefits to the believer. However, Nevin complained that this view of justification only provided a “mere forensic act on the part of God;” it involved “no change of character whatever but only a change of state.” Legal imputation of Christ’s righteousness said little about personal transformation beyond a promise of future sanctification; it issued divine decisions rather than Christian attributes. Such a narrow view was “unintelligible” to Nevin because it only involved an

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319 Ibid.

320 Ibid.
“abstract, outward transfer of Christ’s righteousness.” Nevin, Mystical Presence, 169.

For Nevin, salvation was more than judicious decisions, but its “last and deepest root” was the “unity of Christ in God.” Christian salvation required more than the mere “presence and influence” of a mediator; Christ’s “actual personality” was essential. According to Nevin, it needed to be understood that Christ was “in the believer, and the believer in Christ” in a “bond of common life.” It was this idea of salvation that satisfied what “the Scriptures teach” about “new life.” The “nature of Christian salvation” required this union, and the “demands of the heart and understanding” yearned for it. For Nevin, salvation meant that “Christ does indeed dwell in his people by the real presence of his personal life, through the Spirit, and not simply by the presence of his Spirit as a surrogate for his own.” Christ’s “whole life” was participated in through the “mystical union.” For Nevin, the Eucharist was the “true supernatural vehicle and bearer” of the presence of Christ. Regeneration was mystical, and “the context” of the mystical “occurrence”

321 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 169.

322 Ullmann in Nevin, Mystical Presence, 36. Littlejohn critiques purists in the Reformed tradition who think Nevin wandered outside the strict boundaries of Reformed soteriology. He argued that what some called Nevin’s “theosis” was actually a “creative unfolding of the Reformed tradition.” W. Bradford Littlejohn, The Mercersburg Theology and the Quest for Reformed Catholicity (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 126.

323 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 169.

324 Ullmann in Nevin, Mystical Presence, 36.

325 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 169.

326 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 170.

327 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 173.

328 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 63.

329 Hewitt, Regeneration and Morality, 102.
of salvation was the Church. It would be “treason to the gospel” to deny the fact that salvation contained a personal aspect.\textsuperscript{330} However, it would be equally “one sided and false” to “exclude the dependence of the individual spiritual life” from the general life of the Church.\textsuperscript{331}

Summary

Aspects of Mercersburg’s “Protestant Catholicism”\textsuperscript{332} were unique within America’s religious landscape; they sought to undo negative trends within modernity by offering a “churchly” theology. Mercersburg Seminary called for true revival, but they centered it in Church life replete with creed. They not only affirmed the need for Tradition and a visibly-structured Church, but they directly claimed that the Catholic Church was essential for a vital Protestant interpretation of Scripture. Nevin and Schaff can be credited for opening their theological minds to sacred voices outside their own immediate traditions. It was August Neander who first encouraged them to study patristic works, and they were influenced by their own contemporaries, such as Johann Möhler from Tübingen. Their openness was due to their commitment to the objective and historical nature of theology; they sought continuity beyond their own Reformed milieu.

Mercersburg Seminary’s ecclesiology was able to uphold the central authority of Scripture without burdening it with the entire weight of Christianity. Their affirmation of the historical character of divine revelation enabled them to assert traditional Christian

\textsuperscript{330} Nevin, introduction to Schaff’s \textit{Principle of Protestantism}, 12.

\textsuperscript{331} Ibid.

dogma; they sought to align their theology with the churches through the ages. Nevin and Schaff based their understanding of a sacramental Church on the Incarnation of Christ. The result was that their theology sustained belief in the Virgin Birth, Resurrection of Christ, and the trustworthiness of Scripture, all the while engaging modern thinkers such as Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Baur. In addition, their conviction of Christ’s presence in the Church “until the end of the age” propelled them to seek unity among other denominations; their eschatological understanding freed them to labor under the assumption that Christian unity would indeed be realized.

Despite these strengths in Mercersburg theology, several problems become obvious as well. Their analogy of Catholicism and Protestantism paralleling Jewish Law and Christian Grace floundered. Contrary to Mercersburg’s teachings, the sixteenth-century Reformers did not call for a “new” New Testament. In addition, Catholicism, in reality, was based on faith in Christ’s grace and the power of his Spirit, not on a letter that kills. Although Nevin and Schaff affirmed the value of the Catholic Church, they only tolerated a restricted version of it. They acknowledged the divine role of historical Catholicism, but not its current status. This might have been possible without forfeiting all of their theological differences with the Catholic Church. Finally, despite their efforts at ecumenical unity, and especially in light of their appreciation of patristic sources, it is noteworthy that the Eastern Orthodox churches were largely neglected by Mercersburg’s theologians. In some ways, the Orthodox churches of the East are closer aligned with
Catholicism than Protestant churches. Yet, the Hegelian dialectic of Schaff excluded the eastern churches.\(^{333}\)

In the end, and despite good intentions, Mercersburg theology was not able to maintain its own movement. Similar to other Protestant attempts at renewal, it failed to realize its goals. Some of the reason might lie in their peers. Not many nineteenth-century evangelicals expressed openness to sacramental ecclesiology. Another reason might be their theology’s devaluation of the contemporary Catholic Church. Their Hegelian dialectic did not put them face-to-face adequately with the present day Catholic Church. Continued fragmentation occurred over time, and the German Reformed Church was ultimately merged into the United Church of Christ, a denomination well known for dismantling traditional orthodox Christian dogma. Demystification was inevitable because Mercersburg Seminary could not amply safeguard the deposit of faith.\(^{334}\) The Apostles Creed was insufficient to preserving the faith without the living voice that first spoke the creed.

**The Resultant Rupture**

Controversies between fundamentalists and modernists at Princeton reached an apex in the early twentieth century, resulting in a deep rupture in the denomination and seminary. In the end, the Presbyterian Church and Princeton Seminary split over irreconcilable differences. Many of the contentions came down to how to read the Bible.


\(^{334}\) Hebrews 2:3, Jude 3.
The crisis in the Presbyterian Church would become a prototype for similar divisions throughout American evangelicalism.

Around 1910, a series of pamphlets by different Christian authors entitled *The Fundamentals* began to appear. “The crucial issue” in these articles was “the authority of God in Scripture in relation to the authority of modern science, particularly science in the form of higher criticism of Scripture itself.”335 At first, the authors of these pamphlets applauded the “scientific spirit” common in current biblical studies. Reuben Torrey, for example, claimed that Christianity was established as “historically proven fact.”336 Beyond that, the authors warned against pseudo-science, which ruled out the possibility of miracles and supernatural occurrences before it analyzed the facts. To these authors, modern criticism was not being self-critical. The apologetics of *The Fundamentals* were especially focused on the topics of Virgin Birth, inspiration of Scripture, the atonement of Christ, and his physical resurrection.337

In 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969), a Baptist minister, delivered a sermon at the First Presbyterian Church in New York City, entitled, *Shall the Fundamentalists Win?* In the sermon, Fosdick depicted fundamentalists as “illiberal and intolerant.” They feared modern developments as “strange new movements in Christian thought.” They insisted on consensus regarding “the historicity of certain special

335 George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 120.

336 Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 121.

337 Although evolutionary science was a point of contention for several conservative Christians, as is seen in the Scopes Trial involving William Jennings Bryan, it was not a polemic that Protestants, even fundamentalists, were in agreement. Many, including Warfield, were able to reconcile elements of evolutionary science with the biblical text.
miracles, preeminently the Virgin Birth of our Lord, that we must believe in a special theory of inspiration—that the original documents of the Scripture, which of course we no longer possess, were inerrantly dictated to men a good deal as a man might dictate to a stenographer.” These doctrines and others “are some of the stakes which are being driven to mark a deadline of doctrine around the church.” For Fosdick, all liberals did not necessarily disparage sacred religious claims. Instead, Fosdick was opposed to shutting “the doors of Christian fellowship” based on consent to these doctrines. Fosdick wanted “an intellectually hospitable, tolerant, liberty-loving church” that was intellectually open about such teachings. “You cannot challenge the dedicated thinking of this generation to these sublime themes upon any such terms as are laid down by an intolerant church.”

Bitter infighting continued between modernists and fundamentalists in the Presbyterian denomination, resulting in endless heresy trials and incessant polemics. Princeton Seminary was in the middle of the controversy. It was the last bastion of Old School Presbyterianism and a “lighthouse of orthodoxy in an increasingly secular world.” However, its faculty were divided as well by the late 1920s. The fundamentalists sought to drive the liberals from the denomination, but they were the ones who ended up leaving voluntarily.

In 1929, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church voted to reorganize Princeton, accommodating moderate and liberal theologians, and commenced what John Gresham Machen (1881–1937) feared would be the death of Princeton and “the end of an

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epoch in the history of the modern church and the beginning of a new era in which new Evangelical agencies must be formed.” Machen quickly began to form “new Evangelical agencies.” He soon helped create a new seminary for conservatives, Westminster in Philadelphia.

Conclusion

A survey of American evangelicalism displays diversity of thought related to biblical interpretation. While different approaches to reading Scripture may have their particular benefits, the recurring weakness of evangelical hermeneutics is its lack of ecclesiology.

Within evangelicalism, the Bible is generally posited as the ultimate rule of belief and action, but it has proven incapable to maintain unity among those who believe in it. In a Bible-only worldview, the text of Scripture becomes the framework within which theology is accomplished; it becomes its own paradigm. The truths of Christianity are not discovered in the organic life of the Church, but in the analysis of literary facts. With this working assumption, history can become flat, and spiritual renewal no more than pristine “restitutionism.” In this paradigm, the exegete hopes to get closer to true Christianity primarily by “studying the New Testament documents.”

Most strains of evangelicalism lack an intrinsic self-critical mechanism. Princeton theologians’ “bravado,” for example, was apparently evident to everyone but

340 Longfield, Presbyterian Controversy, 169.


342 Sandeen, Roots of Fundamentalism, 121.
themselves. They did not seem to be aware of the eighteenth-century rationalism that dominated their own “empirical” interpretation of Scripture. Their scientific approach was not pure; it contained unproven presumptions and indicted them with some of the criticisms they had leveled against their opponents. The same can be said about some contemporary Calvinists. Part of their arrogance is due to mistakenly assuming that theology is a scientific endeavor with indisputable results. Princeton criticized Finney because he relied on Enlightenment techniques; however, their inductive method of exegesis had bases in the Enlightenment. They censured Bushnell for departing from old Calvinism; yet, they had departed from Calvinism in their celebration of the Eucharist. They repudiated Mercersburg for wearing the used clothing of Hegel and Schleiermacher; yet, their philosophical rationalism was not necessarily drawn from the pages of Scripture. They criticized Briggs for disregarding the inspiration of Scripture in his exegesis; however, they uncritically relied on similar scientific assumptions. Many of the debates in evangelicalism simply got down to who was more biblical. The people often did not seem aware that they were breathing the same air and held many of the same interpretive assumptions as their opponents. In the end, an emphasis on Scripture alone provided no self-critical capability, did not unify evangelicals, or heal theological schism.


344 Nichols, Mercersburg Theology, 7.
The intense emphasis on the text of Scripture has resulted in a loss of Christocentric hermeneutics. If evangelicals forget that Christ entered real history, and continues to operate through his Church in that history, then their exegesis will be similar to archaeology. They will fall prey to the modernism they are trying to avoid. One historian has argued that the only way for American evangelicalism to escape full entrapment to modernity is to develop a “better principle” in its theology. That principle, he argued, was Incarnation. Hermeneutics guided by Incarnation is pre-modern because it shows that God can and does enter history and it demonstrates that history is accessible. However, hermeneutics guided by Incarnation is also modern, and not docetic. It demonstrates that ordinary time is significant, thus liberating modern methods of research. Nonetheless, this reader asks how one can even get to such a positive determination without the Church. How can one have a Christocentric lens, such as Incarnation, without a Church replete with an authoritative teaching office?

Reflection on evangelical struggles with biblical modernity uncovers the need for a sacramental structure in which to perform biblical exegesis. There is no sacred location within most evangelical thought where Christ’s presence is guaranteed and scholarship can be combined with Tradition. Evangelicals lack a universal cohesive authority to maintain unity and adjudicate theological disagreement while maintaining a Christocentric vision. Most Church groups have some system of adjudication in place, but those systems often lack universal or apostolic character; debates usually come down to who is more persuasive in his reading of the Bible. Scripture has been the structure in

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which theology is achieved, but it has not resulted in the “unity of faith in the bond of peace.” In recent years, appeal to retrieve patristic or medieval texts has surged within evangelicalism, engendering hope of genuine reform. Others have advocated a “creedal imperative.” However, those appeals are not frequently accompanied with equal engagement with the living librarian of those patristic texts and creedal statements. One needs to be concerned that the letter is again being preferred over the Spirit. A few American evangelicals have seen the need for an Incarnational paradigm in hermeneutics, but fewer have explained how such a sacramental lens can be formed outside of a sacramental Church, one physically connected to Christ. To varying degrees, much of American evangelicalism continues to reject a proposition that is older than the New Testament: Christ has established his universal Church with the mandate to “guard the deposit entrusted to you.” For fear of losing their own identity, evangelicals usually deny the legitimacy of the Catholic Church’s role as part of the mystical presence of Christ on the earth. Some evangelicals wrongly fear they will need to relinquish justifiable theological protests; others think they will be forced to mute legitimate calls of repentance directed to the Catholic Church; many have simply walked away. Some evangelicals have simply forgotten that God ordained teachers throughout his universal

346 Cf. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative*. This reader appreciates aspects of Trueman’s criticism of evangelicalism, but thinks he goes astray in furnishing a solution. Trueman identifies cultural “knee-jerk” (21) reactions against creeds within evangelicalism, and unmasks unfounded reasons for such antipathy. However, Trueman concludes, “I believe there is an alternative to Rome: it is confessional Protestantism” (189). While not suggesting Trueman surrender his important differences with Catholic theology, this reader wished Trueman would seek to fulfill the imperative of Christ, which is unity (John 17:20–21). Although it appears to be an impossible task, there must be more direct attempts to directly engage the Catholic Church. Historically, there can be no confessional Protestantism without a Catholic Church.

347 1 Timothy 6:20.
Church.\textsuperscript{348} While reasonably dissenting with the Catholic Church at key moments, they have utterly refused any pastoral guidance from a bishop’s voice. If not abated, the continued demystification of universal ecclesiology within evangelicalism will unfortunately result in theology being perpetually gutted of its sacred innards. As chained Prometheus, evangelicals might experience a sense of renewal at the dawn of every generation, but it will only end with the return of the devouring “birds.”\textsuperscript{349}

\textsuperscript{348} Ephesians 4:11.

\textsuperscript{349} Matthew 13:4.
CHAPTER THREE

BUOYANT EFFECT OF CATHOLIC ECCLESIOLOGY: TÜBINGEN

Introduction

While the Catholic Church’s challenges in the modern era were distinct on many levels from American evangelicals, they similarly needed to respond to the threat posed by biblical modernity. The credibility of external revelation was jeopardized, the transcendent dimension was in danger of being rendered immanent, and immutable dogmatic truths were at risk of being changed. Distinct from evangelical polemics, Catholic responses to biblical modernity frequently integrated ecclesiology. The next two chapters will examine the benefits of ecclesiology in the Catholic Church’s engagement with modernity. Specifically, the buoyancy of Catholic ecclesiology\textsuperscript{1} evident in Tübingen theologians will be highlighted in this chapter.\textsuperscript{2} The hope behind this dissertation is that

\textsuperscript{1} Cf. Avery Dulles, \textit{Models of the Church} (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 2002). Several models of “Church” exist among Catholics, and advocates of particular models debate over the best conception of Church. The use of the phrase “Catholic ecclesiology” here does not intent to imply a monolithic understanding of the institution of the Catholic Church. Rather, it refers to a basic, agreed-upon articulation of Church within Catholicism. The Catholic Church views itself as sacramental, a Mystery, containing both divine and human aspects. It exists in “wholeness or balance” (Dulles, \textit{Models of the Church}, 3) in spiritual and material unity. This includes, but is not limited to, a historic, apostolic succession of bishops, a visible hierarchy headed by a Primate, a living Tradition and written Scripture (Dulles, \textit{Models of the Church}, 7–14).

\textsuperscript{2} With regret, neither the works of John Henry Newman nor the debates surrounding the topic of papal infallibility will be able to be addressed in this dissertation, although both are relevant to the topic of biblical interpretation. It is not possible, in this dissertation, to comprehensively cover the range of Catholic reactions to the Enlightenment throughout various European countries; responses to the Age of Reason varied from France to Italy to England. Nor is it possible to adequately report on every theater of conflict within Catholicism regarding the reading of Scripture.
evangelicals will follow the example herein of analyzing Catholic thought in critical empathy from an evangelical perspective.

The Catholic Tübingen School proves a helpful starting place for examining Catholic responses to biblical modernity. Tübingen theologians highlighted some of the primary challenges perceived by Catholics at the time, and they exhibited some of the perennial hermeneutic resources provided by Catholicism. Certainly, the theology at Tübingen was not fixed or stagnant. Yet, the early theology at the school, specifically the work of Johann Sebastian von Drey and Johann Adam Möhler, provide an adequate entry point for examining Catholicism’s persistent ability to absorb modernity without succumbing to the demystification of theology. Tübingen theologians demonstrated that Catholicism had the ability to open itself to modernity without paranoia, and could even benefit from the engagement. For various reasons, the Tübingen School has been selected as a starting point to study Catholicism’s response to biblical modernity instead of late nineteenth-century theaters. First, Tübingen theologians often provided a genuinely Catholic response which preceded the polemics surrounding Alfred Firmin Loisy and others by several decades. Second, Möhler’s response to modernity drew on Catholic ecclesiology in a manner distinct from some of those in controversy at the turn of the twentieth century. Third, Tübingen’s influence on the interpretation of Scripture in the Catholic Church has continued into the twenty-first century. It remains relevant.

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The Catholic Church certainly did not emerge unscathed from its various engagements with modernity. However, it appears to have weathered the storm much better than did evangelicals. With notable exceptions, Catholic theologians were able to open-facedly engage modernity, while maintaining utmost regard for Holy Scripture and traditional dogma. In addition, it appears that the Catholic Church was able to maintain a higher degree of unity among its people than were evangelicals. From this reader’s perspective, Catholic ecclesiology is partly to be credited.

Modern authors need to give more attention to the positive effect Catholic ecclesiology has had on hermeneutics. Studies of the Catholic modernist crisis often focus on particular crises with modernity to such a degree that they possibly lose sight, albeit unintentionally, of the panoramic view of what occurred. The strong subterranean current within Catholic ecclesiology is often understated while select suppositions of theologians or distinct declarations of authorities are elevated. The broader view of what transpired in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be adequately represented by simply identifying inflated discrepancies between Vatican I and Vatican II mentalities. Such accentuation of disparities is very important, but can risk failure to recognize a deeper continuity grounded in ecclesiology. The contribution of Tübingen theologians to the dialogue with modernity is especially important because it highlights the buoyant effect of Catholic ecclesiology. Johann Sebastian von Drey helped direct the initial theological trajectory of the Catholic Tübingen School. One of his students, Johann
Adam Möhler, is considered the best representative of the rigorous and fundamentally Catholic theology developed at the school.\textsuperscript{5}

**Early Catholics at Tübingen**

A brief look at the polemical context surrounding Catholic Tübingen provides clarity to their ecclesiological constructions. Severe theological criticisms of Catholic theology by Protestants, coupled with formal encroachments on the Church by political states, led to an “apologetic and defensive tone”\textsuperscript{6} in many Catholic ecclesiologies. Catholic theologians pushed back by defining the Church not only as spiritual but also an unequaled institutional authority as well; they often emphasized the juridical power of the hierarchy. In addition to these external attacks, the struggles within Catholicism were no less intense. Kantian thought had begun to influence numerous Catholics. By the nineteenth century, more people were becoming favorable to the idea of an “invisible Church,” which was often set in opposition to the external and hierarchical Church.

The dawning of the rationalistic spirit in the *Aufklärung* had dissipated the ancient mist of divine mystery imbuing the episcopate. In addition, dogmatic formulations which could not be penetrated by reason were finally seen in their supposed proper light; the ethical value of dogma was highlighted while metaphysical claims were understated. Traditional teachings were under assault throughout Europe. For example, the rationalism of English Deism, through its heightened emphasis on human reason, is generally perceived as moving theology to the precipice by calling into question the very

\textsuperscript{5} Michael J. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 1.

possibility of divine revelation. In eighteenth-century France, Voltaire’s attacks on the established Catholic Church, as well as Denis Diderot’s initial compilation of the *Encyclopédie* were representative of broad antagonism against the Catholic Church. However, Leonard Swidler and Michael Himes note that, especially in Germany, not all nineteenth-century perception of the Enlightenment among Catholics was negative. Some German Catholics perceived the *Aufklärung* more positively than did their neighbors to the west, and several saw the moment as an opportunity to reform Catholicism.\(^7\)

Leonard Swidler points out that most histories of the era tend to emphasize the extreme secularization that occurred in some parts of Europe, while neglecting to report positive attempts at integrating Enlightenment thinking with Catholicism.\(^8\) Swidler argues that overemphasis on these negative realities often fail to report positive attempts to reconcile ideals from the modern era with Catholicism.

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\(^7\) Cf. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 2–3, and 7–12; Leonard Swidler, *Aufklärung Catholicism 1780–1850: Liturgical and Other Reforms in the Catholic Aufklärung* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978; PDF e-book), 1–2. Himes cites Ignaz Heinrich von Wessenberg (1774–1860), vicar general of the diocese of Constance, as one example of *Aufklärung* Catholicism. For Wessenberg, only individual members of the Church could be moral; the community as a whole was not considered ethical because it was a collection of free persons. Wessenberg did not consider the individual to be either crippled by sin or dependent upon grace. The human subject was free; therefore, a moral act was genuine only when it was self-motivated by the subject. Wessenberg’s soteriology posited the free individual as one capable of imitating Christ’s altruism; vicarious atonement for humanity was not stressed. God provided each person with a moral conscience consisting of clear imperatives. Subsequently, moral behavior meant living in harmony with one’s conscience, and therefore God’s will. When one followed God’s inner dictates of conscience, he enjoyed a clear sense of direction in life and confirmation of his beliefs. The upshot of Wessenberg’s *Aufklärung* Catholicism was that the conscience became the ground for certitude in religious matters. Wessenberg’s ecclesiology deemphasized the Church as a mystical reality, but laid stress on its function as an educational center. The Church’s teachings contributed to the development of moral conduct among each student. For Wessenberg, even the liturgy’s primary function was pedagogical. Scripture readings, as well as hymns and prayers, were to be in the German vernacular. Religious instructors were to be suspicious of speculative theology and emphasize clarity in their theological training. Pilgrimages were curtailed, but longer sermons were provided. Theology needed to be simple, and faith demanded practical morality.

\(^8\) Swidler, *Aufklärung Catholicism*, 1.
Other German Catholics, notably those who utilized Romantic ideas, were suspicious of attempts to integrate Catholicism with Aufklärung ideals. They perceived that Aufklärung Catholics were naturalistic and materialistic, even Pelagian. Aufklärung teachings dismissed the doctrine of grace through Christ, resulting in the individual being cut off from God, and left alone. Romanticism developed partly as a response to the arid rationalism of the Aufklärung. In response, Catholic theologians at Tübingen developed a renewed interest in the Church’s past. The writings of the Church Fathers, the liturgy, and especially the communal character of Christianity were rediscovered with fresh interest during the struggle with biblical modernity. However, the inherent dangers

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9 Cf. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 21–27; Himes’ introduction to Drey’s *Brief Introduction*, x-xii; Thomas F. O’Meara, *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 41–47, 67; Riga, “The Ecclesiology,” 570–571. Johann Michael Sailer (1751–1832) was a key transitional figure among German Catholics in the move from Aufklärung ideals, which he taught in his early career, to Romantic forms of thought. Sailer influenced several priests whom he taught, many of whom later became bishops. During his academic career, he served as one of Wessenberg’s professors. Although Sailer did not teach at Catholic Tübingen, his influence on the development of the School was significant. His writings influenced Drey, the school’s founder. One of Sailer’s students, Johann Nepomuk Bestlin, was Drey’s pastor at Röhlingen and colleague at Ellwangen and Tübingen. Another of his students, Peter Alois Gratz, was Drey’s colleague at Ellwangen and Tübingen. A third of Sailer’s students, Johann Baptist von Hirscher, joined the Tübingen faculty in 1817. All of these men would later become Möhler’s professors. For Sailer, the Aufklärung was valuable for different reasons, such as seen in its emphasis on education. Nonetheless, for Sailer, the Aufklärung was ultimately unable to elucidate the most important aspects of Christianity. One did not necessarily experience the Sacred through rationally grasping moral concepts. The fashionable terms of “clarity” and “reason” failed to convey the meaning of “life” and “power” that Sailer encountered as a Catholic. Sailer’s Catholicism apparently helped open him to these Romantic ideas. Sailer demonstrated that the mystagogy of experience was nonetheless already present in the structure of the Catholic Church. As a result of Sailer placing heavy emphasis on the centrality of individual experience of the sacred, Michael Himes suggested the Church community risked being reduced to secondary importance in his thought. For Himes, Sailer might even have considered the institutional Church a potential hindrance to those who were being grasped by divine love (cf. Himes *Ongoing Incarnation*, 27). Nonetheless, Sailer did not completely tumble into private pietism. His primary concern was that people might receive more than data about historic faith; they needed to experience the preached faith already present in the Church (cf. Riga, “The Ecclesiology,” 570–571). Also, cf. Keith F. Pecklers, “Ressourcement and the Renewal of Catholic Liturgy: On Celebrating the New Rite,” in Gabriel Flynn and P. D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 320–321.

10 Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 10. Himes is specifically referencing Möhler’s concerns at this point.
of immanentism came with Romanticism. The spiritual study of history risked uniting deity and humanity in history so intimately that the two were not easily distinguishable.

Johann Sebastian Drey

Johann Sebastian von Drey (1777–1853) is generally considered the founder of the Catholic Tübingen School. Drey was raised near Ellwangen, in a strongly Catholic area, and pursued studies in theology and natural sciences. After his seminary years at Augsburg, he was ordained a priest in 1801. Drey taught at the Lyzeum in Rottweil between 1806–1812. In 1812, he was called to teach theology at Ellwangen’s new Catholic university.11 In 1817, Drey moved with the entire Catholic faculty at Ellwangen to Tübingen, where he helped establish the Catholic faculty.

Drey sought to join openness to his times with fidelity to the Church.12 However, he considered the Enlightenment to be impotent in its conveyance of the historic, symbolic, and mystical aspects of Christianity that he knew well from the Catholic Church.13 In countering the sterility of the Aufklärung, he interacted with Romanticism from within a Catholic framework.

Drey and Revelation

The Enlightenment’s denial of revelation was the nub of Drey’s concerns. An exaggerated belief in “independence” severed mankind from divine disclosure. As a

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12 O’Meara, Romantic Idealism, 97.

13 O’Meara, Romantic Idealism, 96.
result, “God and his revelation receded into the background.”\textsuperscript{14} In the same act of professing itself as “I,” humanity declared itself as “Not-I;” by severing itself from God, humanity had lost its true identity. Now, humanity was autonomous, “existing in itself, working of its own accord, and following its own laws.”\textsuperscript{15} The world originated with God, but was no longer subject to his influence. Therefore, it was assumed that the efficient way to study the world was to analyze nature without any religious interference.\textsuperscript{16} In such a world, the Church could not be an ongoing presence of God. Neither could the voice of divinity be heard in the pages of Scripture. Legitimate study of the workings of the human mind could only occur in an environment which was disinfected from religion.

For Drey, Kantian thinking misunderstood the relationship between history and the truths of faith.\textsuperscript{17} It presumed that religious truth was noumenal knowledge which could not be gained by phenomenal experience. There was no possible transport from sense experience, phenomenal knowledge, to noumenal knowledge, the thing in itself. In this system of thought, the archaic testimony of others, a type of \textit{a posteriori} knowledge, could not furnish the basis for contemporary religious claims.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, any claim to theological certainty, such as was contained in Church dogma, was absurd if it was based on historical phenomena. God, human free will, and immortality could not be known in

\textsuperscript{14} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 21:8.

\textsuperscript{15} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 20:8.


\textsuperscript{17} Himes, introduction to Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, xv–xvii.

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Himes, introduction to Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, xvi.
themselves. Instead, such truths came into play as postulates of practical reason; they made ethics intelligible. For the Kantian thinker, the value of religion was its stimulus for the ethical life. For many in the Enlightenment, Jesus Christ became the best possible example of human goodness. Still, his archetypal goodness was discoverable in reason, not in human history. Drey disputed this “most common and the primary way” the Enlightenment mistakenly conveyed historic Christianity. To Drey, Christianity was more than a temporal phenomenon, “one moment in the general history of religion.”19 To Drey, Christianity needed to be understood as the “center of all historical religious phenomena.”20

In his argumentation, Drey tried to avoid the pitfalls of the Deists. He noted that the supernaturalists, those who defended biblical revelation against the Deists, worked under similar premises as their opponents. “Empirical naturalism has denied revelation and positive Christianity. Supernaturalism has been able to respond to this only weakly and never really to refute it, since it stands in the same unhappy position as naturalism and ...combats it with the same weapon.”21 While the naturalists relegated God to being a spectator, one who does not interact with his creation, the supernaturalists made a similar move. The Deists claimed miracles would violate laws of nature, and the supernaturalists agreed.22 For Drey, the presumption that God violated the laws of nature every time he engaged the world diminished the possibility of encountering God through a living

20 Himes, introduction to Drey, Brief Introduction, xv–xvii.
21 Drey, Brief Introduction, 56:3-4.
Church or tracing God’s steps through human history. Drey recognized that the outcome of either side jeopardized the “historical event and religious institution” of Christianity. In response, Drey argued that God’s activity in the world persisted from the beginning. God’s active presence was not a divine intrusion in an autonomous world. In order to accomplish this, Drey recast the relationship of God and the world, the infinite and finite, in the context of primal creation.

For Drey, God can only reveal himself to that which is other than himself, namely, the universe he created. Drey divided the universe into “two realms:” humanity and the rest of nature. He argued that God had revealed himself from within each realm. “The existence of things—including human beings—and their unchanging relationships to one another and to God are the content” of revelation; the world and its history were the substance of God’s disclosure. Underlying Drey’s thought was an awareness of the inexpressible unity of the infinite and the finite. Drey’s world was thoroughly penetrated by God and radically characterized as belonging to Deity. His presupposition was that “every existing finite reality has not only emerged from an eternal and absolute ground but that its temporal being and life remain rooted in that ground and dependent upon it.”

With a Romantic tone, Drey said that the infinite was present in the finite; its presence was in all of nature attracting humanity “as the force of love toward that eternal reality

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25 Ibid.
26 Cf. Fehr, The Birth of the Catholic Tübingen School, 27.
27 Drey, Brief Introduction, 1:1.
which has first poured itself into all things.” Revelation, because it was integral with all of finite reality, “has been from the beginning, continues in the present, and can never come to an end.” Drey would not permit the amputation of revelation from the world or human existence. The bifurcation of reality, found in both the naturalism and supernaturalism of his day, was fundamentally absurd. For Drey, there was no hostility between creation and revelation. For Drey, this understanding instantly made the modern world, the contemporary Church, and all history relevant to understanding divine revelation.

**Drey and Catholicism**

Drey was obviously benefitting from some of the German Idealism of his day, but it would be a mistake to place the primary influence of his thought outside of his Catholicism. Drey demonstrates that as much as he benefitted from new developments in philosophy and epistemology, Christianity, specifically the Catholicism in which he lived, was the constitutive structure of his thought. Without always naming Schelling or other philosophers, Drey admitted that “one system may be more congenial to the spirit of Christianity and hence of greater usefulness to Christian theology than another.”

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30 Hinze attempts to show the fine balance which Tübingen theologians kept over time. On one hand, young Drey, Möhler, and Staudenmaier significantly engaged Schleiermacher and Hegel. This is seen by their emphasis on the work of the Spirit in the individual Christian and the life of the Church. On the other hand, Hinze cautions that their engagement of these philosophers “dare not be overdrawn.” Tübingen theologians clearly resisted reduction of the Holy Spirit to the human spirit, or the common spirit of the community. This dissertation’s author specifically credits Drey’s Catholicism for providing buoyancy to his theology over time. Cf. Hinze, “Roman Catholic Theology,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson, 196–197.
regarded the philosophical system as “best” which was “religious at its base.” Drey borrowed from Schelling’s ideas of Wissenschaft and other philosophers’ concepts, but he attempted to utilize them with Christian presumptions.

Schelling’s insistence that nature and history—the world—were not self-sufficient, but rather forms of the Absolute’s self-manifestation resonated with Drey, who explicitly said, “God’s revelation is the expression of God’s being in another which is not God.” For Drey, this meant that the science of theology must have an intrinsic unity. According to Michael Himes, the idea of Wissenschaft in nineteenth-century Germany had a different connotation from current views of science which may not require universal intrinsic unity. Currently, science is hypothesis, experimentation, and recording of results; a systematic whole is not necessarily presumed. Nineteenth-century Wissenschaft, on the other hand, referred to a body of knowledge organized in such a way that every part of that body was related to certain fundamental principles. Drey, noticing that the “spirit of our age is strongly scientific,” proposed that a “rigorously scientific construction of theology” was necessary. “Arbitrary and merely casual division and association of ideas” was not satisfactory. Schelling’s idea of philosophical knowledge (Wissen), a higher certainty, was important to Drey’s theology because it

31 Drey, Brief Introduction, 96:43.


34 Himes, introduction to Drey, Brief Introduction, xix.

35 Drey, Brief Introduction, 56:23.
maintained the intrinsic unity between various elements of a whole. Schelling’s effort to achieve a “universe of knowledge”\textsuperscript{36} required him to attempt to overcome dualism. The tension between subject and object, finite and infinite, God and the world could not be allowed to dissolve into one against the other. Rather, they needed to be understood in their unity. The human mind must participate in absolute knowing in order to attain certain knowledge. Knowledge of a particular thing was legitimate only as its relation to the whole was understood; an absolute character was required for knowledge to be valid. In this sense, an “\textit{Urwissen},”\textsuperscript{37} or primal knowledge, was needed to understand any specific \textit{Wissen}.

On one hand, Drey did maintain that revelation (\textit{Offenbarung}) was the expression or presentation (\textit{Darstellung}) of God. Drey contended that the “religious impulse” or “religious restlessness of the human heart” historically has been expressed as recognition of the “relation of all things to God.” Specifically, a “dependence on a higher reality” was revealed in the existence of earthly things. Humanity evinces dependence on a higher reality external to itself; this impulse the “human being senses in himself as a drive toward and a demand for free obedience.”\textsuperscript{38} On the other hand, Drey’s personal and free God was distinct from Schelling’s Absolute. In concert with early Romanticism, Drey attempted to recast creation and history as intrinsic to revelation, the effect of which drew human hearts, through love, to eternal realities. For Drey, the Kingdom of God was the governing principle in the inner core of “all God’s decrees” and permeates in all Christian

\textsuperscript{36} Cf. Fehr, \textit{The Birth of the Catholic Tübingen School}, 75–77.

\textsuperscript{37} Cf. Fehr, \textit{The Birth of the Catholic Tübingen School}, 76.

\textsuperscript{38} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 10:4.
doctrine,\textsuperscript{39} as well as ancient human religious history. However, it was Christ who concretely revealed this idea, as did his apostles after him.\textsuperscript{40} God’s determinations concerning humanity and the world were gradually revealed from the beginning. Yet, it was when Christ visibly appeared in the fullness of time that they were proclaimed in “definitive form.”\textsuperscript{41} The Kingdom of God (\textit{Reich Gottes}), that “controlling idea of Christianity”\textsuperscript{42} and “authentic idea of all religion,”\textsuperscript{43} the “supreme” idea, was held in tense unity, both “theoretically and practically” in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{44}

At key points, Drey’s Christology was not compatible with Schelling’s. For Schelling, Christ could be surpassed. For Drey, Christianity introduced something new which was unsurpassable.\textsuperscript{45} To Drey, the Incarnation of Christ climaxed a gradual unveiling of God. However, it was consistent with previous revelations; it fulfilled them.\textsuperscript{46} By fulfilling them, it could not be exceeded. Christianity was not merely a moment in the general history of religion. Instead, as the definite revelation, it became the “summary of all previous revelations because in Christ God has most perfectly revealed himself to humanity.”\textsuperscript{47} The “Incarnation and the idea of the God-man” is

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{39} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 71:30.
\item\textsuperscript{40} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 65:28.
\item\textsuperscript{41} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 60:25.
\item\textsuperscript{42} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 71:30.
\item\textsuperscript{43} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 60:25.
\item\textsuperscript{44} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 32:13.
\item\textsuperscript{45} Cf. Himes, introduction to Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, xxiii.
\item\textsuperscript{46} Matthew 5:17.
\item\textsuperscript{47} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 32:13.
\end{itemize}
revelation in its highest form,\textsuperscript{48} and it fulfilled all previous disclosures. “In all ages,” many have experienced longing for redemption, and many of these desires have “lain dormant.” However, in the “unique historical event” of Christ these human aspirations “were given clarity and vitality.”\textsuperscript{49} For Drey, Christ himself was thus the interpretive lens for all theology. Christ was the decisive arbiter’s judgment bench. In him, some of the ancient religious “concepts and institutions” were “corrected or discarded as insufficient, ineffective, and erroneous,” while others were given a “higher significance, a revitalized strength, a purer meaning.”\textsuperscript{50}

Drey’s christology caused him to sharply part with Schelling on ecclesiology. For Drey, truth could only be understood in its historical form; the infinite was discovered in the finite, and the finite was comprehended when seen in the infinite. For Drey, one could not unite the real and the ideal, the many and the one, exclusively through speculative understanding of the ideas of Christianity; a historic embodiment of truth was needed. Christian revelation was supremely manifested in the historic Incarnation, and the Church was the ongoing corporeal manifestation of that supreme revelation. A theologian must therefore be a man of the Church.\textsuperscript{51} He must theologize from within the historic manifestation of God’s revelation. Without the Church, one cannot get to the “realization of Christianity’s ideas.”\textsuperscript{52}


\textsuperscript{49} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 31:13.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. Himes, introduction to Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, xxiv.

\textsuperscript{52} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 53:22.
Drey also had significant moments of engagement with Schleiermacher, but parted from him at key points. According to Schleiermacher, “the total development of Christianity” needed to be analyzed as a “historical phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{53} This included both attention to the whole, developing over time, and to the particular historical moments.\textsuperscript{54} One of the “defects” that Schleiermacher complained about in theological trends was overemphasis on particular parts of Christianity to the neglect of observing the “total life.”\textsuperscript{55} For Schleiermacher, “knowledge of the whole” of Christianity can only be gained by “combining” a “mass of individual facts” in their relation to one another.\textsuperscript{56} Drey echoed Schleiermacher’s insistence that theology is deficient if it lacks a firm historical basis. Historical skills, such as rigorous textual studies and historical analyses, are foundational to historical theology; knowledge of Christianity in the present is dependent upon the accurate examination of its texts. Biblical exegesis included grammatical analysis, philology, historical study, and clear methods. However, Drey’s Catholicism led him to part with Schleiermacher at key moments.

Theology, for both Schleiermacher and Drey, was a “positive science” which consisted of a body of connected elements. Yet, Schleiermacher claimed that the parts of theology are connected to the whole “only by their common relation to a determinate mode of faith,” such as “Christianity.” According to Schleiermacher, these elements were


\textsuperscript{54} Cf. Schleiermacher, \textit{Brief Outline}, 149:147.

\textsuperscript{55} Schleiermacher, \textit{Brief Outline}, 163:150–151.

\textsuperscript{56} Schleiermacher, \textit{Brief Outline}, 159:149.
not connected by a “necessity arising out of the very idea of science,” but “only in so far as they are requisite for the solution of a practical problem.”\textsuperscript{57} Drey, unlike his Protestant contemporary, could not accept a theology that appeared as “simply accidental.”\textsuperscript{58} For Drey, the extensions of an idea must be studied as if intimately related to its germinal thought. Contemporary Christianity, if it is to be properly analyzed, must be seen in its innermost relation to its historic faith. For Drey, this meant that the theologian’s task was to demonstrate how each particular concrete manifestation of Christianity was generated by and governed by the original Christian idea. Unlike Schleiermacher, Drey gave “the whole of Christianity,” its “history and doctrine,” a “positive reality.”\textsuperscript{59} Drey was indebted to his Catholicism for these necessities; the Protestant had no such obligation.

Unlike Schleiermacher, Drey was convinced that the primal idea of Christianity could best be analyzed in its intrinsic relationship with the contemporary manifestation of the Catholic Church. Drey’s explicit concern was for the “construction of Catholic theology in particular.”\textsuperscript{60} He offered his outline of theology as a “construction of Christian religious belief through knowledge based on the Catholic Church.”\textsuperscript{61} The “phenomenon of Christianity” had a beginning, but its development continued “to the present” in “the Christian church.”\textsuperscript{62} The “true end of theologians and their studies” is

\textsuperscript{57} Schleiermacher, \textit{Brief Outline}, 1:91.

\textsuperscript{58} Drey, forward to \textit{Brief Introduction}, xxxiii.

\textsuperscript{59} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 64:27.

\textsuperscript{60} Drey, forward to Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, xxxv.


therefore “found in the realization of Christianity’s ideas in the church.” For Drey, “the Church, then, is the true basis of all theological knowledge” because it provided the empirical content of theology. Unlike Protestants, Drey could reference the Church as the “concrete expression” of Christianity in contemporary humanity. These convictions expanded Drey’s field of study by giving him more than a text to analyze.

Drey rejected Deism and its disbelief in divine activity in the world. However, to some, Drey’s understanding of the interpenetrating relation between the infinite and the finite risked falling into monism, which would make nature identical with God. Drey’s interaction with Romanticism made him vulnerable to accusations of Pantheism and Panentheism, and the concerns may have been justified at certain points. However, his Catholic context ultimately gave buoyancy to his views. For Drey, the teaching organ of the Catholic Church mattered; divine revelation remained the basis for Christian theology, and the formal concrete terms in Scripture and Tradition needed to be heeded. For example, divine names which specified a free personal God could never be reduced to Schelling’s Absolute. The names for Deity within Scripture were not arbitrary, and they could not be loosely exchanged for ones that seemed more fashionable. The Archetype of the perfect human, Jesus Christ, could not be discovered in the narrow limits of reason alone. Instead, the advent of Christ and Christianity was to be seen by the theologian as the “center of all historical religious phenomena.” The Church was the

63 Drey, Brief Introduction, 54:22.
64 Drey, Brief Introduction, 54:22.
65 Fehr, The Birth of the Catholic Tübingen School, 82–83.
objective phenomenon wherein the ongoing interpretation of Christianity’s Fact occurred. Drey’s thinking may have wandered outside the parameters of orthodoxy at times, but it was the Church that provided those parameters and kept him from rambling too far.

**Drey and Ecclesial Exegesis**

Drey’s biblical exegesis was significantly influenced by ecclesiology. Original divine revelation was directly given to all humanity, and has been revealed throughout history. The emergence of peoples’ consciousness of revelation, albeit in need of purification, appears in numerous traditions throughout the world. Nonetheless, revelation found its perfect form in Jesus Christ, the God-man. For Drey, the transmitters of the revelation of Christ included the Church, Scripture, and living traditions. The Scripture needs to be studied because it is the “primary document” of primitive Christianity; it is divine revelation in written form. However, in order to properly interpret the biblical text, the theologian is required to analyze the “completeness” of Christianity. Drey considered the Church the “living objective reality” and “continuance of the originating event” of the final revelation. The biblical exegete must therefore simultaneously comprehend the “wider expansion” and “development” of the revelation of Christ when interpreting Scripture. For Drey, all exegetical labor needed to occur

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within ecclesiastical parameters. Drey favored the efforts of “lower and higher criticisms.” Yet, philology was insufficient in itself to understand the Scripture. Living Tradition cannot be maintained by “Scripture alone” because the Bible is not the exclusive manifestation of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Similarly, dicta probantia, proof-texting, was “inadequate” because it failed to comprehend the full range of various uses available to biblical ideas. For Drey, the core ideas of Christianity were knowable, but needed to be drawn from the wells of the Church. The Holy Spirit had formed the Church and guided its development in real history. Biblical exegesis needed to occur within the pneumatically-formed structure.

For Drey, revelation was intrinsic to the visible structure of the Church. The Church, formed by the Spirit, was the ongoing revelation of Jesus Christ. Dogma was more than human imaginings; it was explicitly articulating the ideas of God. Drey likened ecclesiastical interpretation of Scripture to inquiring of a living person the meaning of his speech. Questions and clarifications can be bidden of a living speaker. Similarly, “Catholic exegesis” constantly probes the spiritual meaning of the Bible from within the

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74 Drey, Brief Introduction, 47:20.
75 Drey, Brief Introduction, 116:55.
76 Hinze points out that Drey and other Tübingen theologians resisted “every common formula” of the day which attempted to re-define Geist, all the while utilizing several modern theories for their own theology. Although the Spirit was revealing God from the moment of creation, Tübingen theologians kept him distinct from creation. The Spirit was at work in individual persons, history, and society; however, he could not be reduced to the human spirit or the spirit of the community. Also, Tübingen theologians resisted the “Sabellian impulses” which blurred the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity. To this reader, Catholicism provided critical buoyancy to Tübingen theology. Cf. Riga, “The Ecclesiology,” 576; Hinze, “Roman Catholic Theology,” in The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-century Theology, ed. Fergusson, 196–197.
Church. For Drey, the Church remained the locus of revelation, and all interpretation of Scripture must be in concert with what was originally given. Therefore, “orthodoxy” was understood to be “the effort to hold fast to what has been definitely closed in doctrine and to construe what is mutable.” Conversely, “heterodoxy” was an attempt to alter what is “fixed” or alter what is mutable so as to place it against what is fixed. Hyperorthodoxy, for Drey, was a complete denial of the mutability of all doctrines.

Drey’s ecclesiology was an important moment in the Tübingen school’s theological development. German Romanticism’s emphasis on the continuous life that each generation partook of resonated with the communal character of Catholic ecclesiology. Theology on the precise nature of the political structure of the Church’s hierarchy developed among the school’s professors, and individual theologians amended their own views over time. However, the “fundamental intuition” remained the same through these changes: the Holy Spirit fashioned the Church and guided it in all its forms, both visible and invisible.

Michael Himes carefully elucidates vital aspects of Drey’s ecclesiology at many turns, but he possibly places Drey too close to Schleiermacher in the end. Himes argues that Drey’s notion of Tradition was more in line with traditio, the living process of handing on what has been realized, than with tradita, rigidly parroting finished and

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unchanged positions.\textsuperscript{81} For Himes, Drey heralded a new role for the theologian. The “essentially conservative” function of yesterday’s theologian was to “simply” elucidate the Church’s doctrinal positions. The new “progressive” theologian, exemplified by Drey, was “charged with developing the tradition beyond its current state so that it can meet new questions.”\textsuperscript{82} It is not clear to this reader if “progressive” is the best label to give Drey. Tübingen’s founder indeed resisted what he termed “hyperorthodox,” a rigidity that “denies the mutability of doctrine” when an item is plainly “mutable” \textit{(beweglich)},\textsuperscript{83} he saw the role of the theologian as transcending one who simply parrots the Church’s doctrinal pronouncements.\textsuperscript{84} However, he did not present himself as broadly disconnected with his theological predecessors. Drey was interested in carrying forward more than the insights of Christianity; he sought to remain within clearly defined parameters which had been established by ecclesial hierarchy. Perhaps, Drey’s Catholicism needs more attention. Although Drey sought to correct errors among his contemporaries in order to be relevant to his age, it is questionable if he would have perceived his work as creating such a sharp break with former Catholic theologians. Himes’ point risks simplifying Drey by constructing sharply divided categories of “conservative” and “progressive,” and inserting Drey exclusively in the latter. This position is possibly not sufficiently sensitive to Drey’s Catholicism, and it risks casting Drey too much as a progressive in the light of a post–Vatican II understanding.

\textsuperscript{81} Himes, introduction to Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, xxv.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 260:118.

\textsuperscript{84} Himes, introduction to \textit{Brief}, xxv.
Himes argues that Drey’s “new theologian” was kept orthodox by devotion to science, and that the Church’s hierarchy did not exercise a normative function for him.\textsuperscript{85} According to Himes, Drey’s new theologian was kept from the extremes of heterodoxy or hyperorthodoxy by “remaining firm” in the \textit{wissenschaftlich} viewpoint of Schelling.\textsuperscript{86} To this reader, part of Himes’ conclusions need to be reconsidered.

It is correct that Drey was concerned with the rigidity of theologians who failed to emphasize the organic continuous life of Catholicism, and that Drey laid great emphasis on the importance of scientific efforts (\textit{wissenschaftliches Bestreben}) as safeguards for his theologian. However, for Drey, scientific efforts were evaluated by their stance \textit{(Stellung)} on doctrine. \textit{Das Bestreben} apart from the faith of the Church could only result in heterodoxy or hyperorthodoxy. For Drey, the test was whether \textit{das Bestreben} of the theologian were intended “to preserve in doctrine what has been definitively decided.”\textsuperscript{87} The theologian was kept orthodox by his science insofar as his efforts were in line with the concrete faith of the Church. Certainly, various ecclesiologies at Tübingen, including Drey’s, appeared to lean more towards Conciliarism in their views of the Magisterium. However, a hierarchical structure of some sort was required to “protect the creed” and “keep the doctrine pure.” “Church polity,” the “legislative and executive “action” of the Church was needed to “preserve the historical basis of the creed.”\textsuperscript{88} As the ecclesiology at Tübingen was developing, it is doubtful that Drey failed to recognize a “normative

\textsuperscript{85} Himes, introduction to Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, xxv.
\textsuperscript{86} Himes, introduction to Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, xxvi.
\textsuperscript{87} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 260:118.
\textsuperscript{88} Drey, \textit{Brief Introduction}, 334:154.
function” for theology in the political manifestation of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. If the Spirit formed and guided the Church, then hierarchy could not be arbitrary.

For Drey, faith was required for biblical exegesis, and that faith opened new interpretive possibilities. However, Christian faith was located in the Church, in the ongoing life of the people of God in the Spirit. It was “kept pure” and “safeguarded” by the “legislative and executive action” of the Church.89 Drey argued that the exegete must possess an “inner belief” so that he “sees everything and accounts for everything as being under God’s governance.”90 With such faith, the “world’s chaotic confusion” is reinterpreted as the “drama of providence.” Faith provides perspective on both miracles and “ordinary history” that the “profane historian” lacks. For Drey, biblical interpretation grounded in faith was a “higher understanding of the Bible, based not on the flesh but on the Spirit,” mediated by the same Spirit that “originally quickened the authors as they wrote.” This is “far nobler than a matter of grammar and the art is a holy one.”91 Drey commented that the New Testament often furnishes a meaning to an Old Testament passage “which is not demonstrably in accord with the sense of the ancient author…but it is certainly in accord with the meaning of revelation.”92 For Drey, even the Biblicist needed to acknowledge that his interpretation of sacred passages required a view of the entire canon.93 The key to loftier interpretations of the world and Scripture was the

89 Drey, Brief Introduction, 334:154.
90 Drey, Brief Introduction, 114:54.
91 Drey, Brief Introduction, 173:80.
92 Drey, Brief Introduction, 159:75.
93 Drey, Brief Introduction, 160:75.
presence of the Holy Spirit who first formed the Church. The two could not be set against each other.

Drey’s concept of intrinsic revelation affected his biblical exegesis and influenced some Catholic theologians, including Möhler. Drey’s theology was meant to correct the deistic idea of God’s detachment from creation. For Drey, the infinite penetrated the finite, and was encountered in it. The presence of God in creation attracted humanity, as the force of love, toward eternal realities. The Church had been formed and penetrated by the Spirit of Christ from the beginning, and was currently vivified by the same Spirit. As the co-author of the Bible, the living Church needed to be entreated in the process of biblical exegesis.

Johann Adam Möhler

Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838) was born into a Catholic family in the small town of Ingersheim. He began his philosophical studies at Ellwangen in 1813, and turned his attention to theology in 1815. As a student, he moved with the Ellwangen Catholic faculty to Tübingen in 1817. In 1818, Möhler left Tübingen and entered the seminary at Rottenburg. He was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1819; he served in parish ministry in Weil der Stadt and Riedlingen.\(^{94}\) In 1821, Möhler served as a tutor at Tübingen, and was soon offered a teaching position by the Catholic faculty. In preparation for his position, Möhler visited the best known German and Austrian universities, and met several leading theologians. Protestants August Neander and Friedrich Schleiermacher made significant impressions on Möhler due to their

willingness to use organic metaphors to describe the Christian Church.\textsuperscript{95} Möhler’s two 
most significant works were \textit{Unity in the Church or The Principle of Catholicism} (1825), 
and \textit{Symbolism} (1832).\textsuperscript{96} Möhler died when making the fifth revision of \textit{Symbolism}. 
The development of Johann Möhler’s theology is generally considered the highpoint of 
the Tübingen School, and his ecclesiology has affected the Catholic Church up to the 
present day. Philip Schaff considered Möhler the “most important Catholic theologian of 
this age.”\textsuperscript{97}

\textbf{Möhler and Revelation}

Möhler’s Catholicism provided him with resilience in his developing 
understanding of revelation. Throughout his career, Möhler was consistent in stipulating 
the need for divine revelation with living Tradition as its correlate. However, as his 
thoughts formed, Möhler subtly shifted his view on the possibility of a natural 
understanding of God outside of special grace in the Church. Early in his career, he 
argued that no knowledge of God was possible outside the gospel and the Church. Later, 
his view modified to acknowledge a native awareness of God and his attributes in all 
people, even those beyond the influence of historic Judaism or Christianity. To this

\textsuperscript{95} Erb, introduction to \textit{Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the 
Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries} by Johann Adam Möhler, trans. Peter C. Erb (Washington, 

\textsuperscript{96} The English titles will be utilized in the main text of this dissertation, except where the German text is 
utilized. Johann Adam Möhler, \textit{Die Einheit in Der Kirche: Oder Das Prinzip Des Katholizismus} 
(Tübingen: Heinrich Laupp, 1825); Möhler, Johann Adam, \textit{Symbolik, Oder Darstellung Der Dogmatischen 
Gegensätze Der Katholiken Und Protestanten Nach Ihren Öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften} (Mainz: F. 
Kupferberg, 1843; PDF e-book).

\textsuperscript{97} Philip Schaff, \textit{The Principle of Protestantism} (Chambersburg, PA: Publication Office of the German 
Reformed Church, 1845), 91.
reader, Möhler’s Catholic faith was the primary resource that provided him the tools to alter his views.

Early in his career, Möhler resisted the naturalism of the Aufklärung by arguing that it was impossible for the self-sufficient individual to independently possess any spiritual knowledge. Only the revealing act of God could provide humanity with an understanding of the divine; only those in possession of the Spirit could understand divinity. Citing Origen, Möhler argued that human nature was riddled with errors and rendered incapable of achieving the great knowledge of God merely by purification of thought. He referenced Origen’s use of Matthew 11:27 in responding to Celsus’ charge that the concept of God could be deduced simply by enunciating good human qualities and removing the evil ones. Möhler asserted that reason was a passive organ open to God and ready to receive disclosure, but not able to acquire it of its own initiative. No one could independently set out to search for God; however, all had a passive “inner capability to receive the true knowledge of God.” Humanity, in Möhler’s view, was receptive to knowledge about God, but it could not attain any understanding by its own

98 Cf. Geiselmann, The Meaning of Tradition, 62. According to Geiselmann, this emphasis carried from his early teachings through the writing of Unity (1825) and through his work on St. Anselm (1827). A marked change is noticed in Symbolism, (1832) and Letter to Bautain (1835).

99 Cf. Möhler, Unity, 36:17, and Möhler’s use of 1 Corinthians 2:11–12.

100 Matthew 11:27. “No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” NRSV. Cf. Origen, Contra Celsum, par. 17, pp. 330–331.


102 Möhler, Unity, 37:170.
cognitive powers.\textsuperscript{103} “External light cannot reach infected eyes;”\textsuperscript{104} revelation (\textit{Offenbarung}) was required.\textsuperscript{105} Any comprehension of Deity by sinful humanity resulted from the “miraculous” and “unmediated inner action of the divinity.”\textsuperscript{106}

Like Drey, Möhler perceived that God was immanently revealed in universal creation. The universe had its ground in God “and is his total revelation.”\textsuperscript{107} Considering that God had revealed himself in the totality of creation, comprehension of revelation surpassed commanding a series of facts; it involved a grasp of the whole universe. “Only in the whole can he who created the whole be known because he reveals himself completely only in the whole.”\textsuperscript{108} Creation was therefore Möhler’s objective condition which made it possible for humanity to know God.\textsuperscript{109} For Möhler, the universe was represented in humanity. God had spoken his word into all families in the beginning, but his speech could not be understood without a comprehensive audible range. Möhler was left with the obvious question: “How is the single individual to know him?”\textsuperscript{110}

Here, Möhler’s idea of Tradition helped answer the question. What was impossible for the individual was possible to the society through Tradition. A person can

\textsuperscript{103} Cf. Geiselmann, \textit{The Meaning of Tradition}, 59.
\textsuperscript{104} Möhler, \textit{Unity}, 4:88.
\textsuperscript{106} Möhler, \textit{Unity}, 36:169.
\textsuperscript{107} Möhler, \textit{Unity}, 31:153.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Möhler, \textit{Unity}, 31:153.
understand the “relationship”\textsuperscript{111} he has to the “great Whole,”\textsuperscript{112} when, through Tradition, he sees himself as an interrelated member. Tradition provided a comprehensive view of God’s universal revelation. It was only when the individual imaginatively viewed himself in association with the universe that he could sufficiently understand any aspect of it.\textsuperscript{113} By nature, Möhler argued, people learn about themselves in the society of others; self-awareness was developed in a communal environment. Similar to a person who comes to self-knowledge by immersion in relationships, the individual cannot understand the knowledge of God without the external influence of society. For Möhler, conscious knowledge of the whole was not a given. In an accent that resonated with the Romanticism of the day, he argued that the “single individual” must internally “expand” himself to grasp the whole. This universal embrace occurs through imagination and love. The limits of the individual are broken down, which allows him to connect with the whole and understand God. It is love that comprehends God.\textsuperscript{114} The individual can only understand his relation to the whole when he, in love, embraces the “totality” of God’s believers.\textsuperscript{115} The community is the ground for his own existence. “Just as each individual in the whole is grounded in God, God can be known by the individual only in the

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Verhältnis.} Erb translates this as “relationship.” The term also can be translated “ratio.” In other words, Möhler emphasizes that revelation simultaneously takes in view how the particular relates (in ratio) to the whole.

\textsuperscript{112} “\textit{großes Ganze.”} Möhler, \textit{Einheit}, 31:98.

\textsuperscript{113} Möhler, \textit{Unity}, 31:153, and Geiselman, 52–53.


whole... living in Him, embracing the All with a full heart. This is the mystery of our knowledge of God.”

In order to understand God’s revelation, the individual must specifically see himself as grounded in the community marked by God’s Spirit and grace.

For Möhler, the whole revelation could only be understood within Christianity. The sovereign, self-sufficient individual of the Enlightenment was incapable of grasping divine truth because he had separated himself from human society; he had emasculated his own mind, and deprived it of fertility consequential to divine disclosure. Utilizing Justin’s idea of the “Logos,” Möhler wrote that the “seed of the Logos spread among all people.” “Intermittent, separate rays of divine wisdom” had illumined all humanity; even the pagans “found themselves in the possession of truths.”

However, these peoples only possessed fragmented understanding of the divine. They were uncertain whether their disparate truths “corresponded to something outside of themselves or whether they were merely subjective products or some erroneous impressions or assumptions.” Möhler critiqued Enlightenment rationalism as impotent, and he judged the patchy visions of pagans as bearing no “significant result.” Both may have “single truths


117 Geiselmann, The Meaning of Tradition, 58.


119 Möhler, Unity, 37:170.


121 Möhler, Unity, 37:171.

122 Ibid.
concerning God and divine things but not the truth itself.”¹²³ The “desire for the divine, an anticipation, a need for it, the foundation and inner capability to receive the true knowledge of God” common to all people, if “left to itself” could only err “in darkness.”¹²⁴ The special grace in the Church was needed to interpret it. In *Unity*, Möhler argued that humanity could not comprehend any natural revelation. “In Jesus, however, separation came to unity, need to fullness, unconsciousness to clarity.” Truth, God’s truth, objectively appeared in “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the truth in itself.”¹²⁵ The Christian Church was therefore the exclusive community where God’s complete revelation could be grasped.

Möhler used these ideas to resist the construction of *Aufklärung* bulwarks in the territories of Christian doctrine. For Möhler, Tradition was the corollary of revelation. God had revealed himself to all humanity at creation, but this knowledge was scattered as it was passed down through traditions. However, the Church alone possessed all the diverse rays of truth together. Knowledge of God was not available outside of the “special revelation”¹²⁶ discovered in the divinely ordered tradition of Christianity.¹²⁷


¹²⁷ These references reflect Möhler’s earlier thought. For the early Möhler, knowledge of God was not available without special disclosure; however, part of Möhler’s development included a later shift in this stance.
Möhler Shifts

Throughout his career, Möhler maintained the core conviction that divinely
ordered Tradition is the correlate of revelation. Within this principle, however, he shifted
his views on the capability of humanity to comprehend natural revelation apart from
special grace. Catholicism helped stabilize Möhler’s stances, and established boundaries
for future development.

Josef Rupert Geiselmann is credited with noting Möhler’s theological shift of
emphasis made after Unity. Peter Erb and others have concurred,\textsuperscript{128} pointing out that after
the writing of Unity, Möhler adjusted the focus of his anthropology in order to avoid the
danger of pantheism. Möhler’s earlier emphasis on the activity of the Divine in the world
potentially blurred the lines between divinity and humanity. Möhler later became more
keenly aware that the integrity of the human person needed to be protected, and human
freedom preserved. Later, Möhler shifted his emphasis from the individual as rooted in
God, the particular in the universal, to the human in the image of God, laying greater
stress on fallen human nature.\textsuperscript{129} While still maintaining Divine activity in the world,
Möhler focused more on the nature of the human person. Möhler’s shift is noticeable in
the first pages of Symbolism. His first two chapters of Symbolism focus on doctrinal
differences between Catholics and Protestants regarding the state of humanity.
Specifically, he addresses the condition of primitive humanity, the \textit{imago Dei}, and the
nature and consequences of the Fall. At the time of Symbolism, Möhler also was

\textsuperscript{128} Erb, introduction to Möhler, \textit{Unity}, 59.

\textsuperscript{129} Geiselmann, \textit{Meaning of Tradition}, 62–63.
embroiled in various apologetic dialogues with Protestants. Moral freedom, as formally declared by the Church, was at the center of Möhler’s developing concerns. While repeatedly referencing the “Council of Trent,” Möhler emphasized the importance of attributing free will to “fallen man.”130 Although humanity is weakened, it still bears the image of God. Freedom of choice, something most Protestants rejected, remained part of that image. Within his renewed interest in anthropology, Möhler gave less attention to the human being rooted in God in creation through the Spirit, and more consideration to humanity being made in God’s image but suffering from fallen nature.

Möhler’s analysis of Catholic Tradition influenced his maturing understanding of the integrity of the human person and moral freedom. Geiselmann notes that Augustine and the Synod of Orange influenced Möhler to realize that a person can have a rational belief in God without special revelation.131 In addition, in his works Möhler defended medieval Catholic theologians, such as Bonaventure, Scotus, and Aquinas, from Protestant charges. Each author, although in distinct ways, highlighted original sin in humanity and could not be accused of Pelagianism.132 It was also significant to Möhler that the fathers of Trent suggested that “not every religious and moral action of man is necessarily sinful.”133 For Möhler, these Church resources informed him that rational,


132 Möhler, Symbolism, 49–51.

133 Möhler, Symbolism, 46–47. In this immediate citation, Möhler was referencing the seventh canon, not the seventh chapter, of Trent’s sixth session. Citation errors related to Möhler’s statement appear in the translation of the footnotes of Symbolik. The 1843 German edition of Symbolik, pages 55–56, correspond to pages 46–47 in the English edition of Symbolism. In Symbolik, Möhler uses “c.” in his footnotes to
natural belief in God was possible in humanity left to itself. It provided him with the conviction that a person outside the Church can possess natural belief in God’s existence and attributes. Möhler’s teacher, Drey, had already taught him that all societies had received original revelation from God, and had handed down glimmers of the knowledge of God to succeeding generations. The “word which names God is everywhere found.”

Through the most ancient traditions, the basic concept of God was in the languages and cultures of all nations.

At this stage, Möhler began to see the need to distinguish between natural and supernatural knowledge of God. In his letter to Louis Bautain in 1835, Möhler supported Bautain’s position against unbridled rationalism, of which the French philosopher accused the Bishop of Strasbourg. However, Möhler did not concur with Bautain’s excessive reduction of the role of reason in Christian faith. Bautain, almost in a fideistic manner, had argued that divine revelation was the exclusive source of knowledge and certitude about God. Möhler, at this stage, now understood that human reason, even apart from special revelation, was able to understand general truths about God.

reference the “canons” of Trent’s sixth session, and “Cap.” to reference the “chapters” of Trent. Möhler’s intended distinction is seen in footnote 3) on page 55 of Symbolik. However, the English edition translates Möhler’s “c” as “cap.” on pages 46–47 of Symbolism. This mistakenly leads English readers to the “chapters” of Trent’s sixth session, not the “canons.” For Möhler’s particular quote referenced here, cf. Denzinger and Hünemann, Enchiridion Symbolorum, 1557:385, and 1528–1531: 377–378. Further complicating the reference, Charles Ssennyondo lifts Möhler’s quote and places it into a “rephrased” proposition of Trent. However, Ssennyondo restricts the source to Trent’s fifth session; he does not mention the sixth session or its canons. Cf. Charles Ssennyondo, Christianity and the Culture of Relativism in the Anthropologies of Joseph Ratzinger and Stanley Hauerwas (Xlibris, 2012), 159.


argued that natural man left to himself intuitively has basic knowledge of God’s existence and attributes. This knowledge can exist in a person who possesses no awareness of historic Judaism or Christianity. This knowledge is based in primitive revelation; it does not require the “special revelation” required in *Unity* and other earlier works. Möhler’s study of Church theologians helped lead him to these conclusions.

As some shifts were becoming apparent in Möhler’s thinking, he kept the basic conviction that revelation and its corollary Tradition were needed. To Möhler’s thinking, fundamental desire for God was acutely placed in human nature similar to a seed being deeply embedded into the soil.\(^\text{137}\) However, like a natural seed, it needed external stimulus in order to develop. Revelation was that stimulus, and it was conveyed by Tradition. This basic concept did not significantly change for Möhler. The human person did not approach the knowledge of God with a blank slate; but, external revelation was needed to awaken innate truths. In Möhler’s view, Tradition played both a normative and authoritative role in the understanding of God. For him, faith was both traditional and rational.\(^\text{138}\) Faith did not begin with inductive analyses of either the natural world or the interiority of one’s self. Cartesian ideas of the ego insufficiently addressed the human need for communal Tradition. Neither was Christian faith fideistic. Faith did not go out to prove what it already believed. Instead, once the revelation was passed on through Tradition,\(^\text{139}\) each person freely decided to assent to it or not. For Möhler, this made faith rational.

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Soon after the publication of *Unity* (1825), Möhler noticed the need to shift away from the philosophy he had utilized to describe the relationship between God and the world. In *Unity*, Möhler had cast the God-world relationship in a form of panentheism in a fashion similar to Schleiermacher’s and Schelling’s views. Geiselmann termed it “Romantic entheism.” Möhler maintained the transcendence of God to avoid pantheism, but emphasized God being in everything to such a degree that it was difficult to distinguish between the Spirit of the Son (*Geist des Sohnes*) and the spirit of the community (*Gemeingeist*).

It was specifically in his criticism of Schleiermacher in *Athanasius der Grosse* (1827), that Möhler is seen beginning to move away from this panentheistic outlook. In *Athanasius*, Möhler critiqued Schleiermacher’s way of interpreting the relationship between the finite and the infinite, as well as his Sabellian view of the Trinity. It was Möhler’s Catholicism that equipped him to make these moves.

Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith* had put forward three reasons why the Sabellian view of the Trinity needed to be reconsidered, and possibly preferred over the “Athanasian hypothesis” held by the Catholic Church. First, he argued that the “ecclesial” doctrine of the Trinity was not the only option one could take from the Gospel of John. The doctrine of three separate Persons equal in essence was not the necessary clear conclusion of the fourth gospel. Second, the classical view of the Trinity was

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140 Most notably in Möhler, *Unity*, §31.


incoherent. The idea of one and three simply did not work together. Three separate entities comprising the identical essence forced the exegete into disjointed maneuvers. A more sensible doctrine, for Schleiermacher, was a type of Sabellianism which included a gradation of revelation, from Father to Son to Spirit. God was one, with various manifestations revealed over time. These manifestations could not be confused with distinct entities simultaneously existing as one. Schleiermacher’s view meant that either the “unity of essence” was “less real” than the three persons, or the three persons were “less real” than the unity of essence.\textsuperscript{143} Third, the teaching on the Trinity in Christianity was not closed. Schleiermacher argued that there was room for development in articulating the essence of God, especially within Protestantism.

Schleiermacher’s third point was especially alarming to Möhler. Schleiermacher rejected the classic “ecclesial” definition of the Trinity because “obviously there is no prospect” of developing a “formula adequate for all time.”\textsuperscript{144} Our “dogmatic expressions” “inevitably suffer” to explain the immanent relations between Father, Son, and Spirit.\textsuperscript{145} In addition, Unitarians and other Christians who rejected the “ecclesial” definition of Trinity certainly lived lives of piety.\textsuperscript{146} Schleiermacher concluded that belief in such a doctrine of unknowable verities was not essential and certainly should never be a “precondition” of Christian redemption or the “divine life in Christ and in the Holy

\textsuperscript{143} Schleiermacher, \textit{The Christian Faith}, 171:744.

\textsuperscript{144} Schleiermacher, \textit{The Christian Faith}, 172:748.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{146} “In point of fact their piety is by no means lacking” (Schleiermacher, \textit{The Christian Faith}, 172:749).
Spirit.”\textsuperscript{147} Schleiermacher, convinced that the “Athanasiun hypothesis” of the Trinity was neither coherent nor clearly expounded in Scripture, concluded that “new construction”\textsuperscript{148} in the theology of God was required. The term Son of God could no longer “always and exclusively” refer to Christ; distinctions between Christ and other believers needed to be reassessed. The term Father could no longer be used to refer to a “special distinction”\textsuperscript{149} in the divine essence, but should be understood as a stage in divine disclosure.

Schleiermacher’s God, as Monad, could not endure distinctions. When discussing divine attributes, Schleiermacher contended that religious expressions have more to do with “representing the immediate impression”\textsuperscript{150} than establishing scientific knowledge. Dogmatic definitions of God were speculative and ultimately unknowable. Articulations of divine attributes designate nothing in God, but are statements of how people experience God. For Schleiermacher, the God who was revealing himself in the whole was wholly other and defied dogmatic definition. The one infinite God is the mover behind all finite reality; he is constantly manifesting himself anew in creation. It was at this point of conjunction of the divine and human that Möhler detected severe problems.

For Möhler, if God is only known through his relations with the finite, and those relations only convey human impressions and not divine realities, then why even bother with a transcendent God? Exactly what is the nature of the relationship if it is only human impressions, and not essentially God who is being encountered? Why even posit a Monad

\textsuperscript{147} Schleiermacher, \textit{The Christian Faith}, 172:749.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{149} Schleiermacher, \textit{The Christian Faith}, 170:739.

if “nothing is known”\textsuperscript{151} of it? For Möhler, if the term God was an arbitrary affirmation, divine activity was reduced again to the force of the universe. Panentheism was no longer needed; pantheism satisfied once more. To Möhler, panentheism had destroyed the divine pole; it failed to clearly define what humans were to strive towards. In addition, if after “religious interests” a determination is made concerning the number of the divine Persons, then who can tell if some new divine persons are yet to come to light.\textsuperscript{152} There was no reason that a new, fourth, manifestation of God would not come to light. In the end, Schleiermacher’s panentheism caused the particularities of the Christian faith to disappear.\textsuperscript{153}

Practically, Möhler’s greater alarm in Schleiermacher’s God-world relation was the destruction of the finite pole. If the one God was progressively unfolding himself in the embodiment of creation, then the Father, Son, and the Spirit were reduced to the material of God’s self-development.\textsuperscript{154} Schleiermacher’s panentheistic universe rendered humans incapable of genuinely relating to God, and robbed them of their free moral will; it put the integrity of the human in jeopardy. According to Schleiermacher’s Sabellian

\textsuperscript{151} “von der man Nichts weiß.” Johann Adam Möhler, Athanasius Der Grosse (Mainz: Druck Und Verlag Von Florian Kupferberg, 1844), 289f.

\textsuperscript{152} “Gehen wir aber von dem religiösen Interesse aus, und bestimmen darnach die Zahl der göttlichen Prosopen, so werden wir in der gegenwärtigen Zeit eben so wenig bestimmen können, ob nicht noch einige Prosopen oder was immer noch zum Vorschein kommen werde...” But if we take as a point of departure the concerns of religion and decide accordingly the number of the divine persons, we would, in the present age, be just as unable to decide whether a few (more) Persons or who knows what else might come to light. (Möhler, Athanasius Der Grosse, 185).

\textsuperscript{153} “verschwindet allerdings das, was der Christ unter Gott sich denkt”; author’s translation: “What the Christian understands by God, however, disappears” (Möhler, Athanasius Der Grosse, 289). Cf. Himes’s translation: “What the Christian understands by ‘God’ totally disappears.” Himes, Ongoing Incarnation, 184.

\textsuperscript{154} Cf. Himes, Ongoing Incarnation, 183–186.
view of the Trinity, the human being “did not fall,” and was “thus not redeemed from a freely chosen fall.” Original creation was merely incomplete, to be perfected by later “evolutions of the Godhead.” Christianity was a “natural” development of mankind, rooted in the “evolutions of the Deity.” Sequentially, in the first, it was difficult to distinguish the Father from creation; in the second, the Redeemer from the redeemed; in the third, the Spirit from the Church. For Möhler, the upshot of such a scenario was that human freedom was illusory, “Christianity is not salvation, and man is not born again in it.” Möhler saw that the loss of particularity in defining God led to the recasting of God as simply one with the vital force of the universe. Christianity had lost its distinctiveness, and the God behind it all was not really knowable. In the end,

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155 “Nach der sabellianischen Trinitätswahrheit ist der Mensch nicht gefallen.” (Möhler, Athanasius Der Grosse, 286).

156 “Er wurde also auch nicht von einem freien Fall erlöset; das Christenthum ist nicht die Erlösung, und der Mensch wird nicht wiedergeboren in ihm.” Author’s translation: He was not redeemed from a freely chosen fall; Christianity is not salvation, and man is not born again in it. (Möhler, Athanasius Der Grosse, 287).


158 “Mit einem Wort das Christenthum ist eine natürliche Entwicklungsstufe der Menschheit; und weil diese Entwicklung mit den Evolutionen der Gottheit in der engsten Verbindung steht, so wird es eben so schwer, den Vater und die Schöpfung , den Er löser und die Erlöseten, den heiligen Geist und die Kirche ausein-, ander zu halten, und die erste Evolution der Gottheit ist eben die Welt, die zweite die Erlösung, wenn man so sagen will, und die dritte die Kirche geworden.” (Möhler, Athanasius Der Grosse, 288).

Author’s translation: “In a word, Christianity is a natural stage of development of mankind, and because this development stands in the closest connection to the evolutions of the Deity, it becomes difficult indeed to distinguish the Father and the creation, the Redeemer and the redeemed, the Holy Spirit and the Church. The first evolution of the Deity became the world, the second the redemption, if one may put it that way, and the third, the Church.”

159 “Er wurde also auch nicht von einem freien Fall erlöset; das Christenthum ist nicht die Erlösung, und der Mensch wird nicht wiedergeboren in ihm.” (Möhler, Athanasius Der Grosse, 287).
Panentheism caused the divine and human poles to “collapse” into each other.\textsuperscript{160} God was made unreal and vanished.

As he began to move further away from the entheism of \textit{Unity}, which he later considered a “work of an enthusiastic youth,” “not properly digested,”\textsuperscript{161} Möhler searched for a way to describe the God-world relation which maintained an integral connection between the two poles but did not confuse them. Through the several editions of \textit{Symbolism}, Möhler used Chalcedonian Christology to amend his own views and help solve his dilemma. This tool was given to him in the Church, and affected his ecclesiology and interpretation of Scripture.

\textbf{Möhler’s Ecclesiology}

Möhler’s theology of the Church developed over time and demonstrated his struggle to present the Church as necessarily both human and divine. In the end, he retrieved an ecclesiology from the ancient Chalcedonian definition of Christ that postulated both poles in the Church, distinct but united. In addition, Chalcedonian ecclesiology provided him a locus for the interpretation of Scripture.

Möhler sought to retrieve an authentic Catholic ecclesiology; he attempted to avoid several pitfalls, such as God-world relations conveyed by Schelling and Schleiermacher. At the same time, he sought to circumvent fideism found in Traditionalist French authors, such as Bautain.\textsuperscript{162} He attempted to get beyond several Catholic ecclesiologies which were polemical, and noticeably “anti-Protestant, anti-

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{160} “Gott und Welt fallen nach ihm zusammen.” (Möhler, \textit{Athanasius Der Grosse}, 289).
\item \textsuperscript{161} Quoted in Erb’s introduction to Möhler, \textit{Unity}, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{162} Cf. Erb, introduction to Möhler, \textit{Unity}, 59.
\end{footnotes}
statist,” and others which were influenced too strongly by Aufklärung demystification.\textsuperscript{163}

One of the significant struggles of Sailer and Drey was integration of the finite and infinite in ecclesiology. The Chalcedonian definition of Christ helped Möhler better define that relation. His ecclesiology markedly developed from \textit{Unity} through his successive editions of \textit{Symbolism}.

Möhler’s ecclesial recovery included a mystical Church, something that was noticeably absent in Enlightenment rationalism. However, the essential vision of a sacramental Church which was the “self-communicated presence of God”\textsuperscript{164} was consistent in all of his works. Early on, he had described the Church more in terms of a pneumatic reality, while his final works emphasized more of a Christocentric structure. Despite the shifting of his emphases in regards to how God communicated himself through the Church, he consistently asserted that the Church was an essential part of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.

In \textit{Unity}, Möhler centered his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in order to elucidate the principle of unity within Catholicism. He was aware of the tension his emphasis on the Spirit would bring, and that to some it “may appear strange”\textsuperscript{165} that he did not begin with “Christ, the center of our faith.”\textsuperscript{166} In preparation for criticism, he attempted to disassociate himself from any “false idealistic school” and “possible

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Riga, “The Ecclesiology,” 568.
\item Himes, \textit{Ongoing Incarnation}, 327.
\item Möhler, \textit{Unity}, preface, 77.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
mistrueanding.” He defended his stress on the Spirit rather than Christ because the Spirit is who “guides us to the Son.” The Spirit is “first in our becoming Christians.” Although all truth is “originally in Christ,” no one can receive that truth unless he first “participates in his divine life,” which is “the work of the divine Spirit.” The Spirit was the source of all Christian life, whether individual or communal. The “communication” (die Mitteilung) of the Spirit is the basis of personal faith, and faith itself is born in an individual as the effect (Wirkung) of the Spirit. True “Christian knowledge” and the entire Christian life have their beginning in the Holy Spirit. The “dark cloud of sin” is removed in the baptized individual by “the power of the divine Spirit.” However, the “Church community,” as it is “enlivened by the Holy Spirit,” is the basis of the individual Christian’s life. Through the divine Spirit, the Church “exists,” and is “maintained and continued.” The particular must be grounded in the universal; the individual believer cannot be born outside of the Church. No person experiences Christ independent of the Spirit’s “divine life flowing” in the “community of believers.” The “holy, divine life” spreads itself “abroad in the Church.” While “flowing out from the Church,” it grasps and

167 Möhler, Unity, 8:96, note “a.”

168 Möhler, Unity, preface, 77.

169 Möhler, Unity, 8:96.

170 Möhler, Unity, 4:87.

171 Möhler, Einheit, 1:5. Wirkung is translated as “action” by Erb. The term can also reference an impact or effect. The idea of the passage is that the Spirit einwirkt (works, sways or influences).

172 Möhler, Unity, 4:87.

173 Möhler, Unity, 4:89.

174 Möhler, Unity, 6:92.

175 Möhler, Unity, 7:93.
draws “non-Christians in a mysterious and irrepresible way.” For Möhler, the Holy Spirit was not merely an external power “outside of human beings” bringing forth results. Rather, he was “essentially” in the people, making them into children of God. Wherever God works, “there he necessarily is, and what is has being insofar as it is grounded in God.” The Spirit’s work, in Möhler’s Unity, is from the interior of the Church. For this reason, it is “one-sided” to define the Church as merely a human “construction” or “association.” It is better termed an “offspring” of the Spirit. “The total conception of the Church is the love of believers manifesting itself in a specific form.”

The Church’s doctrine is a result of the indwelling Spirit. The Holy Spirit, interior to the Church, ever presses itself outwards. It surges as a living word. The apostles “proclaimed” “in living speech” what they had received, the “whole Church” experienced “extension” (Ausdehnung) under their leadership, and new congregations “continued”

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176 Möhler, Unity, 5:90.

177 Möhler, Unity, 1:82.

178 Möhler, Unity, Addendum 1:269. Einheit, Zusätze 1:278. Here, Möhler inserts the Greek term οὐσιωδός (Ousiōdōs), which he translates wesenhaft. The Greek term οὐσία originally meant the property or substance of a person (cf. Luke 15:12–13, where it refers to property). Möhler’s chosen term refers more to the existent quality of a being; he uses substance with a non-material meaning. His term can mean “essential, substantial, real” in the sense of an individual’s essential reality as a person. Cf. A Greek-English Lexicon. With a Revised Supplement (1996) comp. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1274–1275. For Möhler, the Spirit is intrinsic to the Church. Passages like this were the sort that raised concern that Möhler blurred the lines between divinity and humanity.

179 Möhler, Unity, Addendum 1:269.

180 Möhler, Unity, 49:209.

181 Möhler, Unity, 60:238.

182 Erb, introduction to Möhler, Unity, 45.
after their departure as the “expression (Aussprache) of one and the same Spirit.”\textsuperscript{183} Due to the presence of the same Spirit, “the speaking” (Ausdruck) of a constant doctrine marked “one inner religious life”\textsuperscript{184} as the Church spread out over time.

Between Unity and Symbolism, Möhler shifted his emphasis from a pneumatic to a Christological ecclesiology. Without denying the fundamental role of the Spirit, unity was now seen in the Incarnation. The divinity and humanity of Christ united in one person was analogously seen in the person and work of Christ, and in the Church.

Throughout his career, Möhler consistently affirmed that ecclesial Tradition was necessary to understand divine revelation. “Christ, the Son of God, the New Creator, can be understood only in the totality of his believers.”\textsuperscript{185} In Unity, it was the Holy Spirit within the Church who was notably the source of all Christian doctrines, individual acceptance of Christianity, and the unity of all believers. In Symbolism, however, the Spirit certainly continues to act within the Church, but the “outward institution”\textsuperscript{186} wherein the Spirit operates is given greater attention. While not rescinding his earlier point that the inner principle of the Spirit must have visible expression, Möhler without hesitation now posited the Incarnate Son as the analogy for the ecclesiastical structure. “The divine truth, in a word, must be embodied in Christ Jesus, and thereby be bodied forth in an outward and living phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{187}

\textsuperscript{183} Möhler, Unity, 9:99.
\textsuperscript{184} Möhler, Unity, 9:99.
\textsuperscript{185} Möhler, Unity, 31:154.
\textsuperscript{186} Möhler, Symbolism, 36:258.
The hypostatic union in Christ, as defined by Chalcedon, became Möhler’s ecclesiastical model. Himes points out that Möhler sought to avoid classical Christological heresies in his ecclesiology. The portrayal of the Church influenced by Nestorian Christology distinguished the supernatural and human missions of the People of God to such a degree that the invisible church was divorced from the visible community. Conversely, monophysite ecclesiology fused the indwelling divine into the human institution to such a degree that the human “disappears within a divinized community.”\textsuperscript{188} Analogous to Christ’s person, Möhler asserted that the divine and human must be kept inseparable but distinct in the Church. As Christ’s “permanent manifestation,” the Church is “at once divine and human,” “the union of both.”\textsuperscript{189} Both the “divinity and humanity” of the Church are to be “clearly distinguished” while “bound in unity.”\textsuperscript{190} For Möhler, the Church was the ongoing Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. God “manifested” his action “in Christ, according to ordinary human fashion,” which provided “the form also in which his work was to be continued.”\textsuperscript{191} Thus, the visible Church” is “the Son of God himself,” forever “manifesting himself” among people “in human form.”\textsuperscript{192} Through the “visible Church,” the Son shows himself to


\textsuperscript{189} Möhler, \textit{Symbolism}, 36:259.

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{191} Möhler, \textit{Symbolism}, 36:258.

\textsuperscript{192} Möhler, \textit{Symbolism}, 36:258–259.
others “in human form,” “perpetually renovated and eternally young—the permanent incarnation of the same.”

The Church was sacramental to Möhler: as divine, it maintained a mystical aspect, a divine presence in the earth; as human, it was a datum of the world that could be analyzed and critiqued. It was a living community where Christ was “concealed under earthly and human forms” and effectively communicated through the human authority which he established.

**Möhler and the Hierarchy**

Two years before *Unity*, Möhler reviewed *Das erste Zeitalter der Kirchengeschichte*, the work of famed Catholic patristics scholar Johann Theodor Katerkamp. Despite his admiration for Katerkamp’s erudition, Möhler took issue with the historian’s claim that the Catholic hierarchy was “the center around which everything moves,” the “guiding principle of all history.” In a manner that anticipated *Unity*, Möhler argued that the “true center, the true leading principle of the Church” was “the Spirit of God.” It is correct that one of Möhler’s main foils was the idea of the Church “formulated essentially as a juridical societas.” However, Möhler’s developing

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emphasis on the Spirit, both in his review of Katerkamp’s work and then *Unity,* should not be misconstrued as a dismissal, or even a strong misgiving, of ecclesiastical hierarchy. Such exaggeration should be avoided. Leonard Swidler, for example, nearly pits *Symbolism* against *Unity.* He calls *Unity* “much more liberal, non-papal, non-authoritarian” than *Symbolism,* something more in line with particular post–Vatican II theologies.\(^{199}\) Dennis Doyle claimed that Möhler held that the “main job of the episcopacy and the papacy is not to impose a narrow uniformity but rather to affirm and hold in tension the diverse and often contrary forms of expression that the Christian life will generate.”\(^{200}\)

The degree of contrast between early and late Möhler as given by Swidler, Doyle, and others needs to be questioned.\(^{201}\) Early Möhler does not appear to reject hierarchical structures as would an anti-authoritarian adolescent. His concern, noticed as early as his review of Katerkamp, was that leaders within those divinely ordained structures would not presume autonomy from the living Spirit of God. The hierarchy, left to itself, would indeed become a “blind, dead tool in the hand of the wise.”\(^{202}\) However, Möhler explicitly insisted that the primary function of the episcopacy was positive, not negative.


\(^{200}\) Doyle, *Communion,* 34.

\(^{201}\) Lutheran Carl E. Braaten makes a similar leap when he refers to pre–Vatican II ecclesiology as the “old paradigm” which needed a “revolution.” Braaten claims that a change “in the concept of truth itself” occurred for Catholics at the Second Vatican Council. To this author, Braaten exaggerates what occurred at the Second Vatican Council, and misses the idea of continuity which is inherent in Catholicism. Carl E. Braaten, *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 71–72, 83.

“The hierarchy is necessary; the Spirit of God has initiated a lot of good by it.”\textsuperscript{203} Möhler certainly conveyed concern over juridical religion in his writings, but the “slavery” he warned against resulted from “nonobservance” of the “divine economy”\textsuperscript{204} in the Church’s structure. The episcopacy was an external expression of the Spirit’s love within the Church, not something to be mistrusted. Today, it will make a difference how one portrays Möhler if one assumes the existence of totally externalizing juridical reductionists in his day, and sees Möhler as counteracting them. It might be more accurate to perceive Möhler, in his criticisms of Katerkamp and others, as one who accentuated the positive role of the living Spirit-infused hierarchy. Even in early Möhler, the hierarchy can be seen as a means to unity which does not necessarily sacrifice the external hierarchy as the foundation of Christ’s Church.

\textit{Unity} is valuable to understand the continuity throughout Möhler’s career. To severely divide Möhler’s productions, or place him with others from his “early” era simply in “Post–Vatican II Liberal” or “left wing” categories\textsuperscript{205} fails to recognize the context of his writings. Möhler was not opposed to the idea of an ordained hierarchy within the Church even though there were abuses of it in his era. Instead, he was elucidating the “true center” of the hierarchy in order to prevent further scandal.\textsuperscript{206} The hierarchy was necessary, but it needed to see itself as originating from and maintained by

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{203} “\textit{Die hierarchie ist nothwendig; Der Geist Gottes hat durch sie viel Gutes eingeleitet}” (Möhler, \textit{Athenasius Der Grosse}, 502).
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\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{204} Möhler, \textit{Unity}, 49:210.
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\textsuperscript{205} Cf. Swidler, \textit{Aufklärung Catholicism}, 60–61.
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\textsuperscript{206} Cf. Erb, introduction to Möhler, \textit{Unity}, 38.
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the Spirit. Ultimately, it was the Spirit that formed Tradition as an interior living reality in the Church. For Möhler, the Spirit was not opposed to the hierarchy; the Spirit actually moved within the juridical structure to form Tradition.

In *Unity*, Möhler emphasized that the Spirit presses itself outwards in the “external, visible structure” of the Church, replete with hierarchy. Any “thought of an invisible Church founded on earth by Christ is so completely opposed to Christianity.”

The visible Church, as a living organism, is the “external production” of an inner forming power, similar to a spirit creating a body for itself. For Möhler this implied that the hierarchical structure of the Church was ordered by the Spirit. As soon as the “forming, holy principle was active” in believers, they were naturally drawn to one another and strove for union. This “inner movement” towards unity was satisfied in the bishop. The bishop was the “manifestation” and living center of the Christian disposition; he makes “firm” the consciousness of Christian unity. In *Unity*, Möhler saw the bishop as the “offspring” of the congregation. The bishop’s office could not be arbitrary, simply arising out of human agreement. In reference to Acts 20:28, where Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit made them overseers, Möhler claimed that the modern day bishop was “of divine origin.” The episcopal office was the outward work of the Holy

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209 Möhler, *Unity*, 49:211.


211 Möhler, *Unity*, 52a:221. Erb notes, in footnote 28 on page 419, that the sections were numbered incorrectly, resulting in two § 52. This quote is from the second § 52, marked by Erb as §52a. The German copy simply lists §52 twice, with no §52a.
Spirit; it reflected the expressed desire for unity and free production of the love of God’s people. The spirit of unity was in each church, but the realization of that spirit was centered in each bishop. “If these are removed, there is no longer a Church.”

In *Unity*, Möhler continued to describe the various offices of the Metropolitan and the total Episcopate. Each serves as a center of an expanding unity. However, the singular body of the Church, the “organic unity of all parts in a whole,” could not be complete without the Primate, Rome’s bishop. Otherwise, the Church would merely be a “lifeless mass” of “dead concepts.” It would not be a single living Body. Möhler argued that the history of the early centuries of Christianity, despite needing “further development and outward formation,” supported the claim that the occupant of Peter’s chair was the “prototypical unity of the Church.”

From *Unity* through *Symbolism*, Möhler consistently affirmed the need for a living hierarchy. He saw the need to provide a “deciding authority” in the Church. Möhler perceived that “Christ wished to be the adequate authority for all ages,” and the Church was how he concretely realized “his authority before all generations of men.” The proclamation of the Gospel needed A “visible, human medium” was needed, which would proclaim the gospel through “visible envoys.” For Möhler, a “visible society,”

213 Ibid.
which was “under the guidance of the Spirit,” was given the leadership of the Church. It would be a “contradiction” to suppose that the Incarnate Savior’s authority would be continued through “purely spiritual means.” “All” will relapse “into darkness, uncertainty, doubt, distraction, unbelief, and superstition” if ecclesiology is not analogous to Incarnation. The Church was “the visible community of believers, founded by Christ, in which, by means of an enduring apostleship,” is “under the guidance of his Spirit” until the “end of the world.” Truth is “manifested and embodied” in the Church and its leadership.

Möhler maintained a distinction between an infallible Church and fallible leaders. The Church placed herself in the heart of an evil world. Consequently, those in the Church often have “wild, untamed natures.” The Church’s “priests and bishops fall not from the sky!” From the days of Judas onward, “there has been much evil in the Church.” Möhler argued that “Catholics must not shrink from” admitting the unfaithfulness and immorality of its leaders, “for Protestants themselves furnish irrefragable proof of the state of manifold neglect.” Möhler makes a key distinction

219 Ibid.
220 Möhler, Symbolism, 37:266.
222 Möhler, Symbolism, 36:258.
223 Möhler, Symbolism, 37:263.
225 Ibid.
between individual failure and an infallible church. “The human” leadership of the Church is “not inerrable in itself, but only as the organ and as the manifestation of the divine.”

“We all have erred—it is the Church only which cannot err.” To no individual, considered as such, does infallibility belong.” Instead, “the living Christ and his Spirit” are what “constitute undoubtedly that which is infallible.” Only when the individual leader is conceived as a “member of the whole,” as “living and breathing in the Church,” and “conformable” to the Spirit and word within the Church, can he “attain to inerrability.”

The polemical setting of Möhler at this time needs to be understood. He was not necessarily arguing in favor of or against papal infallibility. Instead, he was fighting the “individualization” of his day, which was opposite the “notion of community.” Möhler recognized that the hierarchical leaders of the Church often missed the mark, but the Spirit never failed the Church. The Church, specifically the hierarchy, needed to submit to the Holy Spirit.

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233 It has been extensively debated whether Möhler would have supported, and to what degree, the doctrine of papal infallibility articulated at Vatican I three decades after his death. Ignaz von Döllinger, for example, claimed Möhler could not be associated with such a view. Others, such as Fritz Vigener, see Möhler as a forerunner of the Council’s *Pastor Aeternus*. Some of Möhler’s writings suggest he would favor final human authority resting in the entire episcopate. His works also suggest the legitimacy of infallibility in an individual pope who is living as part of the whole Church. Regardless of how Möhler would have responded to the Vatican Council, the key point for this paper is that Möhler’s ecclesiology consistently posited a visible, hierarchical Church, centered in the office of the bishop of Rome. The arrangement of the hierarchy over time was divinely ordered by the Spirit, and could not be seen as arbitrary. Cf. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 315, especially note 96.

Möhler and the Interpretation of Scripture

Möhler and Tübingen theologians were conscious of the “ecumenical dimension to Christian theology.” Möhler and Tübingen theologians were conscious of the “ecumenical dimension to Christian theology.”235 The interpretation of Scripture, for Möhler, must be conducted in an ecclesial context. The Church, as the Body of Christ, was intrinsic to divine revelation;236 it was essential to the fullness of God’s disclosure in Jesus Christ. The Church is the location of Christ’s mystical presence. “He dwells in the community.”237 Therefore, one must be in the Church to expound Christian dogma. Möhler critiqued Protestants because they supposed they could interpret Scripture after separating from the Body.

“Outside the Church,” the Holy Scriptures are “not understood” because the Spirit, who authored the text, is resident in the Church.238 The Church has always been found with the Spirit, and the Spirit will always be found in the Church. The clear “internal consciousness of God”239 is only obtained in the Church. Referencing Origen, Möhler argued that the Church was not founded on the letter, but on the Spirit.240 “The person who has the Spirit will acknowledge it in the form of the Church,” and subsequently “understand the letters.”241 Referencing Ignatius of Antioch’s letter to the

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236 Cf. Doyle, Communion, 27.

237 Möhler, Symbolism, 38:278.

238 Möhler, Unity, 8:97.

239 Ibid.

240 Möhler, Unity, 8:98.

241 Möhler, Unity, Appendix 1:327.
Smyrnaeans, Möhler contended that heresy has always been understood as a separation from unity. It is a revolt against the “organic coherence of all believers.”242 “Heresy understands the Christian as isolated and knows no common Spirit.”243 Heretics flourish when “the concept of the Church is defined in a one-sided manner,” as merely a human “construction or an association, founded for the preservation and perpetuation of the Christian faith.”244 Several heretics acknowledged the same Scriptures that the Catholic Church used, but perverted the meaning of the texts.245 However, others contradicted the gospel by the “fictional creation” of their own scriptures.246 Through reading the Church Fathers, Möhler concluded that apostolic succession had always been seen as the setting in which to interpret Scripture. As an example, Origen’s mystical allegorical reading of Scripture consistently operated within the “rule of the heavenly Church” as it came down “through apostolic succession.”247 “The Church was founded by Jesus and has come to us through an unbroken succession.” The interpretation that contradicts the Church is the false interpretation.248

Although the Scripture must be interpreted according to the faith of the Church, Möhler did not advocate a particular method of exegesis. Each method was conditioned by its culture and the expertise of its era; also, every method has its capricious twisters of

242 Möhler, Unity, Addendum 5:277-278.
243 Möhler, Unity, Appendix 1:327.
244 Möhler, Unity, 49:209.
246 Möhler, Unity, 21:131.
247 Möhler, Unity, Addendum 7:293.
248 Möhler, Unity, Addendum 7:293.
truth. Instead, the Christocentric vision furnished by the Church is the prerequisite focus of any exegetical method.

Origen’s method might certainly seem anachronistic and “of little use” to modern exegetes, and it cannot be allowed to become a “restriction of the exegete.” However, Origen’s explication of Christ in the Scriptures should be considered “uncommonly significant, inspired, and truly divine” to any Catholic reading of the Bible because it opens “the mystic veil” for all ages. Christ is the vision of all exegesis. He is the center of the biblical text, and he is encountered in every passage. This “peculiar Christian sense,” this “ecclesiastical consciousness,” which tradition provides, is “the standard of Scriptural interpretation—the rule of faith.”

For Möhler, a unity comprised of distinct duties existed between scientific exegesis and the Church’s interpretation of the Bible. The ecclesiastical interpretation of Scripture “does not descend to the details.” In other words, it does not concern itself with determining the authorship of particular books within the Bible, intertextuality between books, the history and grammar in the texts, or stimuli behind the biblical authors penning certain texts. Such important details are necessary, but are left to “learned” and “scientific” exegetes. Instead, the Church’s role as interpreter of Scripture applies to

249 Möhler, Unity, Addendum 7:293-295.
250 Möhler, Unity, Addendum 7:294.
251 Möhler, Unity, Addendum 7:295.
252 Möhler, Symbolism, 38:279.
the “doctrinal concepts of Scripture,” to the “essential matter of Holy Writ.” Its “interpretation extends only to doctrines and morals.” The ecclesial interpretation of Scripture addresses the loftier vision of the Church and remains constant through all ages in a deeper understanding of its mystical Resident, who is “eternally present in the Church.” The Church “exists only by Christ, and yet she must have to find him out.” While scientific exegesis rightfully seeks to study the objective details surrounding the sacred text, the ecclesial interpretation cannot begin with a blank slate.

For Möhler, an ecclesiastical interpretation of Scripture provided the fullest meaning to the Scripture. Möhler criticized modern exegetes who demystified the text because of the unnecessary limitations they placed on themselves. By separating themselves from any idea of a divinely ordained teaching office in the Church, they thought they could “teach themselves and rise above all times.” Yet, in the end, they could “understand neither earlier times nor themselves.” For Möhler, the faith of the Church opened penetrating insights into Scripture otherwise inaccessible. Möhler said it succinctly in a footnote attached to his Preface to *Unity*:

> I do not think much of the proposition that to write a history one must be without religion, native land, and the like. Insofar as this means that a historian must be unbiased, I agree, but one can be unbiased only if one has religion, and this must be a specific religion since there are no unspecific ones.

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256 Ibid.


Ecclesial faith provided practical value to Möhler by allowing him a greater opportunity to be self-critical. He was able to rise above his own milieu because of his Catholicism.²⁵⁹ Knowledge of a communal faith required more than individual erudition. Möhler’s presumption of the continuity of the one faith conducted over time by the one Spirit suddenly made the ancients his contemporaries. Although it was Lutheran August Neander who primary encouraged Möhler to study patristics, it was Möhler’s Catholicism that instructed him to read them as authorities. By assuming continuity within a Church marked by apostolic succession, Möhler was able to correct his own ecclesiology with Chalcedon.²⁶⁰ He was able to modify his theology by emphatically returning the Incarnate Christ to the center of his thought. He was not afraid to explore within the mists of Schelling and Schleiermacher because the ancient breeze of Catholicism blew Romanticism’s dreamy fog away at key moments.

**Möhler as Catholic**

Johann Adam Möhler’s theology, as well as the thought of others associated with Tübingen, is best understood when it is located within Roman Catholicism. Möhler interacted with multiple currents of thoughts, and several rivulets of contemporary ideas can be traced in his works; however, Catholicism is the steady undercurrent of his reflections. Some have considered him to be the “most important figure in the formation


²⁶⁰ While Möhler affirmed that Christ personally gave the deposit of faith to the apostles, he did not see theology as static. Chalcedon was a developed articulation of the original deposit of faith. Hans Boersma writes that Möhler and Johann Evangelist Kuhn viewed doctrinal development as theological; doctrine developed organically from Christ’s original deposit of faith. Cf. Hans Boersma, “Analogy of Truth: The Sacramental Epistemology of Nouvelle Théologie,” in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-century Catholic Theology*, ed. Flynn and Murray, 165.
of ecclesiology as a field of systematic theology,“ one who anticipated “the major movement of Roman Catholic thought” in the twentieth century. However, it is misleading to then suggest that Möhler’s theology “began” in the “appropriation of the insights of German Romanticism.” This risks distortion. It is true that aspects of Romanticism appealed to some theologians, including Catholics at Tübingen, because of their “longing for communion with the transcendent,” but it is false to suggest that their desire for a “richer and warmer spirituality” was birthed in nineteenth-century Germany. Möhler must be understood as constitutively a Catholic; he picked fruit from a vast orchard of Romantic thought, but he was not the product of that grove. He used different philosophies to better understand his own faith which had been born in the Church.

In his review of Katerkamp’s church history, Möhler resisted an overly-polemical portrayal of the Church, and suggested the center of the Church has always been life in the Spirit. “The basic teachings of Christianity were, if I may use the expression, lived.” They “were held in the feasts, in the whole liturgy.” The present creeds and doctrines confessed by the Church were not the result of adapting past philosophy to a modern

261 Himes, Ongoing Incarnation, 2.
262 Himes, Ongoing Incarnation, 331.
264 Himes, Ongoing Incarnation, 3.
265 Möhler, “Katerkamp,” 484–532. The article is Möhler’s review of a portion of Katerkamp’s work, and appears in the 3rd quarter (Heft 3) of the quarterly Tübingen publication of 1823. Peter Erb translates the passage, “The basic doctrines of Christianity were, if one may so say it, lived; they were in the feasts, in the whole liturgy, and presented with physical necessity and preserved for Christians.” Erb cites a larger passage and lists it as located on page 500, but this quote is actually found on page 499 of the ThQ available on line. Cf Erb, introduction to Möhler, Unity, 37.
milieu. Instead, ecclesiastical symbols were developed in a lived Christianity. Peter Erb cites Möhler’s initial response to the completion of *Unity*, as recorded in a letter to friend. In it, Möhler claimed to have “discovered” a “living, fresh, full Christianity.” Möhler, as a Catholic, and certainly as a priest, was living in the sacramental life of the Church. He recovered ancient living traditions from within the living context of Catholicism. When he enthusiastically claimed to “discover for the first time a living, full, fresh Christianity,” he was already standing in the Church’s territory and mining its ancient soil. The mystery was not necessarily ever lost for him. Even when he severely critiqued a view of the hierarchy which reduced the institution to a juridical reality, he saw no need to escape hierarchy and institution altogether. To this reader, Möhler seemed to understand that some of the juridical ecclesiology he spoke out against was partially a response to the Reformation, and Church-State tensions. Möhler was doing more than simply constructing an ecclesiology “over against a medieval, juridical view of the Church.” He was retrieving what already existed.

Definite shifts are noticeable throughout Möhler’s career, but it is possibly more helpful to highlight the continuity in his thinking. As Erb mentioned, too much characterization of Möhler in categories such as “mature” only “misrepresent the situation.” A view of Möhler’s continuity is obscured by simply inserting him into Vatican I and Vatican II categories, according to whether his texts were from his

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“younger, more liberal years” or from his later “more conservative period.”

Although it is beneficial to track Möhler’s improvements, failure to emphasize the continuity he owed to Catholicism is detrimental. Based on the breadth of writings Möhler has provided during his short lifetime, it appears he would have at least attempted to discover continuity between the two councils and their aftermaths, rather than pit one against the other as is not uncommon today.

As is obvious in both Unity and Symbolism, Möhler was an apologist for Catholicism throughout his career. Although he hoped for reconciliation with Protestantism, he dialogued as a Catholic, not a minimalist ecumenist.

Neither can Möhler be reduced to Romanticism. Unquestionably, Möhler interacted with German Romanticism, but he moved away from Schelling and Schleiermacher at key moments because of his Catholicism. It would be an “error” to define him as a “subjectivist.”

Möller maintained buoyancy because his Catholic faith was his fundamental anchor.

Möller’s foundational Catholicism is seen in the censure levied by one of his fiercest critics, Tübingen’s Ferdinand Christian Baur. Both Baur and Möhler agreed on the nature of what they called “Symbolics.” Möhler considered Symbolics to be the “scientific exposition” of doctrinal differences among various religious groups. By starting with the formal symbols, or confessions, of a religious party, one could break down respective “dogma into the elements out of which it has been formed,” in search of

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270 Note Erb’s portrayal of Möhler as a Catholic apologist in Erb, introduction to Möhler, Unity, 2–6.

271 Erb, introduction to Möhler, Unity, 15.
the “ultimate principles” manifest in the symbols. Once the confessional parts of a system were viewed in relation to the whole governing principle (gestalt) of that system, the essential nature of the religious confession could be analyzed. After this, the essential nature of that particular religious system would be viewed in relation to the Gospel and Christian reason. The purpose of this theological method was to determine the validity of particular religious confessions, such as the Protestants’, in light of the “universally acknowledged truths” of Christianity. Möhler claimed that such a method of Symbolics could “furnish a solid and impartial account” of religious differences through scientific analysis.

Baur basically agreed with Möhler that a scientific treatment of doctrinal differences consisted in uncovering the system behind doctrinal statements; the totality of final confession and governing principle needed to be seen together. For Baur, “Symbolics” “seeks to reconstruct two opposed doctrinal concepts as systems by grasping each in the unity of its principle.” This was because “at the root of each system lies a primary determination of the religious consciousness.” However, Baur accused

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272 Möhler, *Symbolism*, introduction, 1; Möhler, *Symbolik*, Einleitung, 2. *(Hier wird es nöthig sein, ein Dogma in die Elemente, aus denen es zusammengewachsen ist, auseinanderzulegen, und auf die letzten Gründe, durch welche die desselben bestimmt wurden, zurückzuführen.*) Himes possibly gives too negative a translation to zurückzuführen when he translates it as “decompose.” The term suggests “to take back, return or bring back” to its ultimate basis. It does not suggest decomposition. The goal is to analyze, not destroy. The idea of “break down to its component principles” was inserted in this paper.


274 Ibid.

his Tübingen colleague of being unscientific because Möhler operated out of Catholic presumptions.

For Baur, Möhler failed in his claim to “scientific objectivity” by refusing to grant Protestantism an equal claim to truth as Catholicism. In Symbolism, Möhler censured Protestantism as ultimately mere subjectivity, the apotheosis of Luther’s ego. Möhler acknowledged that evil behavior of individual Catholic leaders fanned the flames of the Reformation. However, Baur argued, Möhler was selective in what he critiqued in Protestantism and Catholicism. Baur argued that Möhler failed to adequately address the confessional character of Protestantism, merely reducing it to Luther’s ego. In addition, Baur accused Möhler of being unwilling to consider that the essence of Catholicism, not just a few individual Catholics, was part of the problem in the sixteenth century. In short, Baur argued that Möhler was not scientific at all; he operated out of Catholic presumptions.

Baur’s analysis was correct in that he recognized that Möhler did not study religion from a sterile laboratory. Due to his Catholic ecclesiology, Möhler’s Church

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274 Baur’s criticism appears to be partly legitimate. Möhler frequently reduced Protestantism’s successes to Luther’s “most singular disposition of mind” (Möhler, Symbolism, 62); the “whole Lutheran system” was only understandable when one understood that it came in its entirety from Luther’s selection of choice Scholastic fruit (Möhler, Symbolism, 32); Luther’s claim that every Christian was a priest of sorts must “have arisen in Luther’s mind” (Möhler, Symbolism, 322). For Möhler, the reason Protestant teachings regarding original sin were widely accepted was that “Luther’s spirit gained so complete a victory, that his views, nay his expressions, were adopted into public formularies” (Möhler, Symbolism, 89). Möhler’s simple reduction of Protestantism to a singular German theologian’s thoughts is not reasonable. Such a view neglects the scriptural and traditional bases of some of Luther’s views. Luther, too, was Catholic and operated from a stance of Christian faith. Also, many other Protestants, and even Lutherans, disagreed with Martin Luther during his lifetime on certain theological points. Possibly, Möhler was judging Luther as if he were a nineteenth-century liberal Protestant like Baur. Regardless, such exaggerations are not uncommon in polemics. Further, Möhler’s error of reductionism does not invalidate his insistence that theology must occur in the context of a living Church.

277 Cf. Fitzer, Moehler and Baur in Controversy, 44–47.
remained sacramental. To Möhler, the Church was alive, visible, full of the Spirit, and still speaking. It could be studied no other way. Baur’s scientific analysis left little room for a mystical faith. He, like other Protestant contemporaries, could only study religion as an archaeologist uncovering unmarked graves in an ancient tomb.

Conclusion

Catholic ecclesiology gave Tübingen theologians a degree of resiliency during their engagement with biblical modernity. When the Catholic Tübingen School began in 1817, the influence of the Aufklärung was being felt in German Catholicism. Certain Church leaders integrated Enlightenment ideals with Catholicism, and highlighted the practical preference to ethical living over dogmatic faith. Others were left questioning the credibility of revelation. In response, some thought they found an “ally” of the Christian faith in the “seminal” spiritual aspects of Romanticism, or in one of the other rapidly developing philosophies. Insistence on humanity’s innate spiritual sense appeared to be a bulwark against the Enlightenment’s mechanistic determinism. However, divine revelation, at least in a Christian sense, was still often rejected. Both the validity of revelation and the validity of the Church’s witness to that revelation were excluded by most philosophies. Even Drey and Möhler each appeared to drift at different moments. However, they each were able to move away from toxic elements in contemporary thought at critical moments. Drey, for example, never exchanged the Christian God for Schelling’s Absolute, and Möhler, through Chalcedonian Christology, was able to avoid

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279 Masson and Jay, “Romanticism,” 118.
Schleiermacher’s panentheism. Christopher Ruddy argues that the Tübingen theologians “offered the most nuanced engagement with the intellectual challenges of modernity” among Catholic thinkers. To this reader, Catholic ecclesiology played a significant role in the buoyancy of Tübingen’s theologians. Their life in the Church influenced the development of their thought as much as did their scholarly abilities. Despite the scholarly accomplishments of Tübingen’s Catholic theologians, the stimulus of their work was discovered in a retrieval of ancient sources already existing in the Church. They integrated “scriptural and patristic Ressourcement” with the thoughts of Schelling, Hegel, and Schleiermacher.

The works of Tübingen’s Catholic faculty influenced the theology of subsequent generations. Möhler and the Tübingen School were antecedents to twentieth-century Ressourcement theology. Möhler’s sensitivity to the critical role of history in revelation influenced theologians such as Marie-Dominique Chenu, and his Chalcedonian view of the Church not only influenced Yves Congar, but the entire

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281 Christopher Ruddy, “Ressourcement and the Enduring Legacy of Post-Tridentine Theology,” 194.

282 The writings of Newman, Kuhn, Scheeben, Adam, Congar, de Lubac, and the proceedings of Vatican II demonstrate this claim.


“ecclesiological movement of the twentieth century.” Maximilian Heim notes Möhler’s influence on Vatican II’s assertion that the Church is “one complex reality” of “the visible together with the spiritual.” In addition, Möhler was instrumental to Pope Benedict XVI’s sacramental ecclesiology, specifically the view that the Church was understood “by way of analogy with the Incarnation of the Divine Logos.” Even recent Protestant attempts at Ressourcement might trace some of what has influenced them to the Catholic Ressourcement, and then back to Möhler and other Tübingen theologians.

It is questionable if evangelicals can exhibit buoyancy without rigorous ecclesiology, and without much regard for the Catholic Church. Tübingen theologians read the Church Fathers from within the Church, with the assumption that the Fathers had a normative value for theological determinations. Their confident use of these resources, as well as their open-faced engagement with modernity, largely came from their lives in the Church.


287 Heim, Joseph Ratzinger, 515.

288 Cf. the section on evangelical Ressourcement in the fifth chapter of this dissertation.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESTORING EFFECT OF CATHOLIC ECCLESIOLOGY: BEYOND THE MODERNIST CRISIS

Introduction

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Catholic leaders perceived that the threat of biblical modernism was growing. Some in the Church’s hierarchy feared that the transcendent dimension was being jeopardized through a philosophy of immanence. This, they claimed, would eliminate the need for divine inspiration of Scripture, which would in its turn marginalize traditional Church dogma. These concerns were some of the reasons behind a search for a unitary method of philosophy and theology within Catholicism. For some, the solution to modern philosophical and theological dilemmas was found in pre-modern resources. Specifically, scholastic methods, notably the thought of Thomas Aquinas, were utilized. The nineteenth-century retrieval of scholasticism is generally referred to as Neo-Scholasticism, or Neo-Thomism.

Over time, others in the Catholic Church perceived Neo-Scholastic theology to be narrow-minded and its advocates rigid in their application of its methods. Among other items, they argued that Thomas was being misinterpreted by the new scholastics. The extrinsic aspects of revelation were being accentuated by Church leadership to such a degree that other valid understandings of divine revelation were played down. Several Catholic thinkers were disciplined by the Church for employing methods that were
contrary to Neo-Scholastic procedures, which only added to existing tensions in ongoing polemics. For good reasons, historians often refer to the time period as a crisis for the Catholic Church. To some in the Catholic Church, many long standing foundations appeared to be unstable.

Despite ongoing internal disputes, Catholic ecclesiology eventually helped restore a noticeable degree of theological equilibrium back into the Church over generations. Catholic philosophers and theologians offered modes of thought distinct from Neo-Scholasticism and the theology of the manuals. To this reader, credit was due to underlying ecclesiological assumptions in Catholicism as much as the erudition of any particular author for providing steadiness to the Catholic Church in its time of crisis.

Although the Catholic Church engaged multiple changing realities in the modern world on several levels, this dissertation will focus on its encounter with modernity relative to biblical interpretation. This work will accentuate the stabilizing effect of Catholic ecclesiology during crises, as it operated through various authors and events. Conversely, evangelicals may have some brilliant theologians, but they do not have any outstanding ecclesiology. Evangelical theology will continue to exhibit instability if this reality is not addressed in more depth.

**Promotion of Neo-Scholasticism**

In 1907, in *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, Pius X identified “modernism”\(^1\) as a “system” with two sides: “agnosticism” was the negative side, and “vital immanence”

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\(^1\) The term was formally used over twenty times in *Pascendi*. Cf. Pius X. *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. The Holy See. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html).
was the positive side. According to Pius X, the philosophical errors of modernism had directly affected theology and biblical exegesis. Therefore, the entire “system” of “modernism” needed to be critiqued. He described modernism as the “synthesis of all errors.” In response, the Catholic Church put medieval scholasticism forward, especially the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, in order to comprehensively counter the growing threat of “modernism” in both philosophy and theology. Neo-Scholasticism was perceived to be capable to deal with contemporary philosophical challenges and engage good developments of modern science. It was often characterized by a rigid method of amassing external data in order to support propositional claims. It sought to convince its opponents of particular religious claims by undeniable external evidence. Although Neo-Scholasticism’s advocates thought they were retrieving scholasticism from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it has been demonstrated that instead they were drawing on

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3 According to Pius X, the principle of philosophical immanence misled theologians to conclude that “God was immanent in man,” resulting in the “objects” of faith becoming merely symbolical. This resulted in a loss of Church dogma. The idea of eternal inspiration of Scripture was subsequently lost, and the Bible was reduced to human testimonies of religious “experiences.” Cf. Pius X. *Pascendi*, 19–22, and 39. Also, cf. Denzinger and Hünermann, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 3487–3491: 700–701.


Baroque misinterpretations of Thomas. In reality, Neo-Scholasticism did not convey the full-orbed quest for truth evident in Thomas and other medieval scholastics.

This dissertation is focused on theological and exegetical developments; however, it is important to briefly examine the philosophical use of Neo-Scholasticism to combat modernism. The Catholic Church, due to its ecclesiology, was able to respond to more than how one interpreted the Bible. It was also able to address philosophical issues perceived to be deeply related to reading the Scripture, but distinct from it. Despite the restrictive method of Catholic Neo-Scholasticism and its narrow parameters of thought, a noteworthy distinction becomes evident opposite Protestantism: the Catholic Church had the resources to comprehensively safeguard Church dogma through its ecclesiology. The Catholic Church could directly address scriptural exegesis, as well as the philosophical environment in which those labors were made. Despite the detrimental restrictions of Neo-Scholasticism, the Catholic Church’s ecclesiology helped it restore mystical elements to its theology which had been neglected. Over the next two generations of internal polemics, and various misjudgments by the Catholic hierarchy, this distinction would prove significant.

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7 Cf. Wicks, *Manualistic Theology*, 1104.
Philosophical Neo-Scholasticism

**Pius IX and Vatican I**

Pius IX’s (1846–1878) first encyclical, *Qui Pluribus* (1846), was a broad response to much of the previous century’s rationalism and agnosticism. Pius brought attention to a “very bitter and fearsome war against the whole Catholic commonwealth” that was currently being “stirred up by men bound together in a lawless alliance.”

Specifically, Pius criticized the philosophical systems of the Church’s opponents. He blamed the conflict on “many harmful methods” peddled by self-proclaimed “philosophers.”

“These men do not preserve sound doctrine, but turn their hearing from the truth.” It was “by means of” their “obviously ridiculous and extremely specious kind of argumentation” that these philosophers were misleading people. The principal error of these philosophers was to deny the rational justification for religious faith. They “invoke the power and excellence of human reason” to such a degree that it disparages “the most holy faith of Christ.” The “philosophers” claimed that reason had rendered religious faith unintelligible. Therefore, the thoughtful person would need to either confine his religious faith within its proper limits or outright reject it. Philosophy, which was

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8 Pius IX, *Qui Pluribus*, 4

9 Throughout the struggle with modernism, several authors were targeted. However, Immanuel Kant often stood out as the great enemy of the faith even when he was not named.


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.
supposed to be directed towards discovering truth in nature, was used by these men to set reason against faith.

For Pius, faith and reason needed to complement one another. “They give such reciprocal help to each other that true reason shows, maintains and protects the truth of the faith, while faith frees reason from all errors and wondrously enlightens, strengthens and perfects reason with the knowledge of divine matters.” Although Pius argued that the conclusions given by divine revelation could “never be arrived at or perfected by human reason,” he affirmed the ability of reason to demonstrate the authenticity of Christianity.

Pius laid emphasis on the persuasiveness of external demonstrations of the Christian faith. Contrary to the skepticism and agnosticism of his day, Pius contended that Christian revelation was convincing, and that human reason had the ability to understand it and positively respond to it. In his encyclical, Pius argued that open-minded people were capable of analyzing the data of faith, and rationally acquiesce. “Anyone” who considers the evidence for Christianity will “easily understand” the religion’s divine origin. Certain proofs, most notably those based on the prophecies, life, and miracles of Jesus, were “ready at hand;” they provided a rational person with sufficient reason to believe. “Human reason knows clearly from these striking and certain

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proofs that God is the author of the Christian faith; therefore it is unable to advance further but should offer all obedience to this faith, casting aside completely every problem and hesitation.”

Throughout his pontificate, many of Pius IX’s encyclicals imply an embattled Church. In addition to philosophical concerns, apprehension over nineteenth-century encroachments on the Church by political foes is evident. On many fronts, Pius IX was compelled to address “the great anxieties and difficulties, especially in these evil times, that the episcopal ministry is exposed to.” In a letter to Italy’s bishops, Pius IX warned that “wretched enemies of all truth” were employing “a variety of deceits for turning the spirits of the Italian people away from the Catholic faith.” He called on the bishops to “spare no effort and to shrink from no problem in protecting the practice of the Catholic religion.”

In his 1864 encyclical addressed to all bishops, *Quanta Cura*, and the attached *Syllabus of Errors*, Pius IX denounced the growing separation between the secular and religious spheres of life. He condemned what he perceived to be an effort “to raze the foundations of the Catholic religion and of civil society, to remove from among men all virtue and justice, to deprave persons, and especially inexperienced youth, to lead

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20 Even by the end of the century, during Leo XIII’s pontificate, some leaders in the Church perceived the need for an over-arching method to address the challenges of modernism, and prevent “ad hoc” responses to them. Cf. Russell Hittinger, “Pascendi Dominici Gregis at 100: Two Modernisms, Two Thomisms: Reflections on the Centenary of Pius X’s Letter Against the Modernists,” *Nova Et VETERA, English Edition* 5, no. 4 (2007): 854. Hittinger suggest the socio-politico concerns were primary for the Vatican. Without ranking an order of primacy between the social, political, philosophical, and theological, this dissertation, while acknowledging the importance of all aspects for nineteenth-century Catholicism, focuses on the theological reading of Scripture.


22 Pius IX, *Nostis Et Nobiscum*, 1, 3, 34.
it into the snares of error, and at length to tear it from the bosom of the Catholic Church.”23 Pius IX restated and categorized eighty propositions he had previously condemned. Among the propositions he denounced was that Christian faith was opposed to reason, and that fidelity to revelation hindered human perfection.24 He also condemned the idea that human reason was the ultimate judge of all truth and falsehood, and that religion ultimately flowed from the “inborn” power of human reason.25

Near the end of his papacy, Pius IX came to the defense of the Church in Prussia, complaining of “the contempt of episcopal dignity, the violation of the Church’s freedom and its rights, the abuses which oppress not only those dioceses mentioned above, but other Prussian dioceses as well.”26 Although the broad term “modernity” was not formally used by Pius IX or the Vatican at this time to succinctly describe its foes, it was clear that they perceived the formation of a new alliance which opposed the faith. A unified evil from outside the Church was attempting to fracture the Church’s philosophical, political, and theological foundations.

*Qui Pluribus* primarily critiqued those outside of the Church. However, by the middle of the 1850s severe censure of Catholic thinkers was becoming more common. Catholic leadership was increasingly anxious that its own people were being influenced by modern errors. The enemy had infiltrated the camp, and the leadership identified him

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26 Pius IX, *Quod Nunquam*, 5.
by his methods. Conversely, some theologians and philosophers in the Catholic Church were not alarmed with the new methods, but eagerly explored ways to reconcile the faith with current thought. Although Catholic thinkers were not united in their methods, the Church was “aligned” against the form of rationalism that “rejected the intellectual and moral claims of positive Christian revelation.”  

The Vatican’s heightened concern regarding its own thinkers was evident in its disciplinary actions. In the end, the methods of several theological systems were scrutinized, and numerous Catholic thinkers endured sanctions. Gerald McCool notes that in the eleven years between 1855 and 1866 the Vatican’s leadership had led possibly an unparalleled regulation of the development of theology. The Church’s hierarchy interpreted some attempts to demonstrate the compatibility of Catholicism with the modern world as discordant with the Catholic faith. According to the leadership, some Catholic philosophers blurred distinctions between natural and supernatural orders, which led to confusion about the relation between philosophy and theology.

On one hand, Catholic traditionalists denied reason’s natural ability to acquire certain knowledge of the first principles of metaphysics and ethics. This resulted in undervaluing the ability of natural reason and often led to fideism. On the other hand, Catholic thinkers who emphasized human intuition blurred the lines between nature and grace, compromising the “freedom of man’s creation” and the “gratuitous character of the


28 Cf. McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*, 129–132. Of course, it could be argued that the challenges to the faith were likewise perceived to be unparalleled.

order of grace and faith through its metaphysical unification of creation, illumination, and revelation.”

Some of the forms of rationalism put forward by Catholic philosophers attempted to ground first principles in human reason. These philosophers claimed the human mind could grasp naturally knowledge that was previously considered exclusive to the province of revelation, thus neglecting philosophy’s dependence on theology. In addition, the Cartesian subject starting with a reflection on his own act of knowledge led to the metaphysics of a thinking mind separated from a world of extended bodies. Similarly, Catholic ontologists posited an intellectual intuition of God in order to ground first principles of metaphysics and ethics. In these different systems, the metaphysical unity of humanity and nature was demolished, and the essential distinction between philosophy and theology was potentially undermined. All of this was unacceptable to the Vatican’s leadership. Within roughly a decade, various forms of “traditionalism, ontologism, Günther’s dualism, and Frohschammer’s rationalism” were condemned. Almost every form of theology among Catholics had been denounced in short order, with the exception of Scholasticism.

At the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), the bishops and theologians drafted *Dei Filius*, the Dogmatic Constitution on revelation and faith. *Dei Filius* cautioned

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31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.


35 Although papal infallibility was a significant issue at Vatican I, it is not the focus of this dissertation. The centuries-old dispute among Catholic theologians regarding the primacy of papal or conciliar authority is recognized, but cannot be addressed in detail here. Much of evangelical Protestantism has outright
against both a “generalized”\textsuperscript{36} rationalism which assumed the sufficiency of “human reason in itself”\textsuperscript{37} as well as a supernaturalism which failed to demonstrate “the basis of faith.”\textsuperscript{38} Although the Council participants were conscious of the effect of Kant’s critique on Christian claims of religious knowledge, their attention was not focused on rebutting him directly. Nor did they combat French supernaturalists precisely. Instead, they attempted to elucidate a positive path between the extremes of rationalism and fideism by clarifying a “twofold order of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{39}

First, the Council affirmed the ability of human reason to discover general truths about God through observation of the external world. God can be “known with certitude by the natural light of human reason from created things.”\textsuperscript{40} A general knowledge of God was available to all people. Correspondingly, the Council critiqued exclusive confidence in human reason to understand divine truths. The Council contended that God had chosen to reveal specific truths which were “impenetrable” to human reason “left to itself.”\textsuperscript{41}

Through revelation, centered in Jesus Christ and safeguarded by the Catholic Church,

demystified the Catholic Church, or any church, regardless of its internal structure. In addition, Möhler’s broader emphasis prior to Vatican I was the Church; the pope was understood within that purview. This dissertation will attempt to keep that wider focus. For that reason, attention is given to Vatican I’s \textit{Dei Filius} rather than the conclusions on papal infallibility.


\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Dei Filius}, 4.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Dei Filius}, 4; Cf. Daly, \textit{Transcendence and Immanence}, 8.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Dei Filius}, 2.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
these truths could be “known readily by all with firm certitude and with no admixture of error.” Miracles and prophecies served as “external proofs” of revelation, “suited to the intelligence of all.” The Council insisted that particular “certitude” was possible in both orders of knowledge, confirmed by legitimate “external proofs.”

The distinctions between the “supernatural” and the “natural” in Dei Filius were not intended to suggest an antithesis. Rather, “although faith is above reason, nevertheless, between faith and reason no true dissension can ever exist.” “God cannot deny Himself, nor ever contradict truth with truth.” The “same God” who “reveals mysteries” and “infuses faith” has also provided people with “the light of reason.” Dei Filius attempted to express the two orders of knowledge as harmoniously benefitting each other. Faith was rational, and reason could be “illustrated by faith.”

Russell Hittinger points out that one difficulty with documents of this era, such as the Syllabus of Errors, was they were negative in nature; they focused on identifying “liberal theses” without explicitly formulating positive “Catholic Doctrines.” Although the Church did not endorse a unitary method at the time, it is noteworthy that Scholasticism emerged somewhat unscathed from formal disapproval. A growing number of Catholic theologians found secure footing in what they considered a return to Saint

42 Dei Filius, 2.
43 Dei Filius, 3.
44 Ibid.
45 Cf. Daly, Transcendence and Immanence, 8.
46 Dei Filius, 4.
47 Ibid.
48 Hittinger, Pascendi Dominici Gregis at 100, 853.
Thomas. They assumed their system was a retrieval of thought which predated the modern era, and which enabled them to recover weapons which could combat the assaults of harmful ideas. As the intrinsic errors of contemporary thought systems became evident, scholasticism was increasingly favored because it could meet modern scientific demands and maintain fidelity to the deposit of faith.49

**Giovanni Perrone**

One of the most prominent thinkers of the era was Jesuit Giovanni Perrone (1794–1876). Although Perrone may not be considered a full “adherent” to the complete appropriation of Neo-Scholasticism,50 his works were in circulation until Vatican II in order to teach principles of scholasticism.51 His recourse to the pre-modern bolstered the growing confidence in scholastic methods. To Perrone, his ideas contained in his large nine volumes of *Dogmatic Theology* were not new. Instead, for him, it was Saint Thomas who had planned long ago to refute modern errors such as the ones Spinoza had promoted.52

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Perrone’s thought was expounded in strict, logical, and “forensic” style.\textsuperscript{53} The structure of his writings was first, a propositional statement, then different objections to the proposition, and then concluding refutations of those objections.\textsuperscript{54} He gave attention to rational external supports for revelation, such as fulfilled prophecies and miracles.

Perrone made divine revelation the initial focus of his work. He immediately made it clear that he was writing against “deists and rationalists”\textsuperscript{55} who were challenging the validity of a religion based on revelation. Perrone refuted Deists who claimed that miracles contradicted the created order, and that “God cannot do miracles without changing himself.”\textsuperscript{56} He argued that the same God who gave the “decrees that govern the world” also gave “decrees” for the miraculous.\textsuperscript{57} Perrone countered skeptics, such as Hume, who discredited the “historical and moral certainty” of Christian testimony. Perrone contended that if one were to outright discredit the testimony of others, then there would be no certainty about any ancient history.\textsuperscript{58} Although Perrone was not strictly Neo-Scholastic, he helped demonstrate that the antidote for the contemporary malaise was increasingly being sought in what some thought were pre-modern medications.

\textsuperscript{53} Daly, \textit{Transcendence and Immanence}, 13–14.

\textsuperscript{54} This is his style throughout \textit{Théologie Dogmatique}.

\textsuperscript{55} Perrone, \textit{Théologie Dogmatique}, 4:103.

\textsuperscript{56} Perrone, \textit{Théologie Dogmatique}, 3:49. “Dieu ne peut pas faire des miracles sans changer lui-même. Les Lois qui régissent le monde sont, en effet, des decrets de Dieu qui ne peuvent pas changer sans qu’il y ait changement en Dieu, ce qui est absurde.”

\textsuperscript{57} Perrone, 3:49. “Elles sont les décrets même s de Dieu, qui ont pour objet soit les lois, soit les derogations de ces même s lois, qui doivent avoir lieu dans le temps.”

\textsuperscript{58} Perrone, \textit{Théologie Dogmatique}, Chapter III. Proposition II, under heading \textit{Objections tirées du défaut de certitude}, 3:67. “Si pourtant les arguments de ce genre et autres semblables avaient quelque valeur, ils bouleverseraient et anéantiraient la certitude morale et historique, et l’on n’aurait aucune certitude sur ce qui s’est passé dans les temps anciens, et que nous raconte l’histoire.”
Joseph Kleutgen

One of the most influential proponents of a return to a pre-Cartesian philosophy in Catholic thought was Joseph Kleutgen (1811–1883). Gerald McCool considers Kleutgen to be the “most profound and original thinker” among Jesuit Neo-Thomists, as well as the most influential.59 After his appointment as consultor to the Sacred Congregation of the Index in 1851, he provided sufficient theological footing to reinforce several of the disciplinary judgments enacted by the Congregation.60 Additionally, he participated in drafting the Constitution of the Catholic Faith for Vatican I, and was reportedly one of the authors who drafted Aeterni Patris for Leo XIII.61 Two of his works, Die Theologie der Vorzeit62 and Die Philosophie der Vorzeit63 long served as apologies for the scholastic method in Catholic thought.64

When addressing the sickness of the modern world, Kleutgen clearly observed a chasm between “the old and the new”65 in both theology and philosophy. In noting this, he effectively cut the history of Christian thinking in half, with clear deference given to the earlier age. Although philosophy and theology were distinct disciplines with different

60 The Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition (formed in 1542 and renamed Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office in 1908) merged with the Sacred Congregation of the Index (formed 1571) in 1917. Benedict XV’s Alloquentes proxime declares their merger. The Congregation, often referred to as the Holy Office, was renamed the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in 1965.
64 Cf. McCool, From Unity to Pluralism, 21–22.
65 From the subtitle of his first chapter of Die Philosophie der Vorzeit: Ueber die alte und neue Philosophie in Allgemeinen. 1.
starting points, he perceived that both were failing because of “new” principles and methods.

For Kleutgen, the remedy for the current malady was a return to medieval thinking. Kleutgen’s repeated use of the term *Vorzeit*, translated *l’ancienne*, certainly refers to ancient modes of thought evident in patristic authors. However, he generally used the term to denote medieval scholastics, specifically the work of Thomas. This was because Kleutgen considered Scholasticism as the full flowering of patristic thinking. The schoolmen’s Aristotelian methods were superior to the early Father’s Platonic methods. Scholasticism had perfected patristic thought. Through the Scholasticism of Thomas and Bonaventure, ancient Christian thought had “reached its peak.”

For Kleutgen, the “new” ideas plaguing Catholicism primarily came through Descartes, and constituted a monumental historical breach within Christian thought. It was Descartes who sought to “break” “openly” from the philosophy that had “prevailed in the Church” since its beginning. Descartes sought to create a “new basis” for philosophical research and build a “new foundation” for his system of thought.

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66 For Kleutgen, Philosophy’s first principles are evident to reason, while theology’s first principles need revelation; Theology’s first principles are only seen through the light of faith. Cf. McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism*, 21–23.


68 Joseph Kleutgen, introduction to *La Philosophie Scolastique* (Paris: Gaume Frères Et J. Duprey, 1868), 3:4. “Dans la philosophie de Descartes, nous devons distinguer trois choses; car, brisant ouvertement avec la philosophie qui régnait alors dans l’Eglise, il voulut donner une nouvelle base à ses recherches philosophiques et construire un système de doctrines sur ces nouveaux fondements. Non content d’attaquer quelques doctrines isolées de la scolastique, il ne craignit pas de dire que jusqu’à lui on avait complètement ignore le premier principe de toute philosophie véritable, ainsi que la method seule légitime
Descartes considered his method of rationally beginning with the person’s “proper existence,” his self-awareness, as the only “legitimate” start to philosophical knowledge. Conversely, Kleutgen maintained that philosophy’s first principles were objectively discerned. Although the first principles of Christian theology required revelation and faith, they were observable and accessible through Scripture and the Church’s Tradition.

Kleutgen “devoted” his efforts to restoring Scholasticism, and his influence was effective. Despite the fact that philosophy and theology constituted distinct orders of knowledge, Kleutgen sought to restore a coherent integrated method of thought applicable to each. He attempted to vindicate the Aristotelian scholastic method for “apologetics, and positive, speculative, and moral theology.”

Leo XIII

As the nineteenth century continued, Neo-Thomism gained greater authority during the pontificate of Leo XIII. The thought of Aquinas, in particular, was put forward as providing the Church with a positive and unitary method. The “magna carta” of the

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69 Kleutgen, La Philosophie Scolastique, Introduction, 4:5. “La méthode, que Descartes regardait comme seule légitime, consiste en ce que l’esprit humain, partant de sa propre existence dont il ne peut douter, n’affirme que ce qu’il reconnaît avec la même clarté.” In German, Joseph Kleutgen, Die Philosophie Der Vorzeit, Introduction, 4:5–6.


71 McCool, Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism, 86.
revival of official Thomism was Leo XIII’s 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. The pope had institutions in mind who would train students for the priesthood. He warned that the “Catholic philosopher will know that he violates at once faith and the laws of reason if he accepts any conclusion which he understands to be opposed to revealed doctrine.”

*Aeterni Patris* was a call to unify the methods of philosophy and theology within a Scholastic paradigm, and to show the compatibility of faith and reason. “Those, therefore, who to the study of philosophy unite obedience to the Christian faith, are philosophizing in the best possible way.”

The call for a unified method was only logical since God was the author of all truth; one truth could not contradict another. For Leo XIII, the “bitter strife” and “false conclusions” of the day “originated in the schools of philosophy;” the academy denied the “force” of “those things which become known by revelation.”

Unfortunately, some current philosophers “overestimate” the capability of the human mind, and presume that the intellect subject to “divine authority” was “retarded and hindered in its progress” towards truth. Some perceived that the Church obstructed intellectual progress. Leo XIII responded by saying that the “right use of philosophy”

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73 Daly, *Transcendence and Immanence*, 10.
“in a certain way tends to smooth and fortify the road to true faith.”\textsuperscript{80} Certain truths confessed in the Church went “beyond” reason’s capabilities; however, “humble” “esteem” for revelation could enable the intellect to soar beyond its limited abilities. Referencing the recent Vatican Council, Leo XIII claimed that “faith frees and saves reason from error, and endows it with manifold knowledge.”\textsuperscript{81} Philosophy had a specific “path”\textsuperscript{82} it must follow; it was intended to support the faith, not assault it. For Leo XIII, Scholasticism, and specifically the work of Thomas Aquinas, best fulfilled that call.

The diverse “patrimony”\textsuperscript{83} of Christian philosophy included the works of various esteemed authors, including Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Boethius, and several councils. However, these “scattered” “fertile harvests of Christian learning” needed to be “diligently” collected, sifted, and stored up “in one place.”\textsuperscript{84} The helpful “science”\textsuperscript{85} and “excellence”\textsuperscript{86} of Scholasticism, “in particular angelic St. Thomas and the seraphic St. Bonaventure,”\textsuperscript{87} provided the Church with a “formidable”\textsuperscript{88} philosophy for the modern world. Citing the sixteenth-century statement of Sixtus V, Leo XIII praised Scholasticism’s ability to provide “ready and close coherence of cause and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{80} Leo XIII, \textit{Aeterni Patris}, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Leo XIII, \textit{Aeterni Patris}, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Leo XIII, \textit{Aeterni Patris}, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Leo XIII, \textit{Aeterni Patris}, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Leo XIII, \textit{Aeterni Patris}, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Leo XIII, \textit{Aeterni Patris}, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Leo XIII, \textit{Aeterni Patris}, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Leo XIII, \textit{Aeterni Patris}, 16.
\end{itemize}
effect,” “order and array as of a disciplined army in battle,” lucid “definitions and distinctions, that strength of argument and those keen discussions,” whereby “light is distinguished from darkness, the true from the false, expose and strip naked, as it were, the falsehoods of heretics wrapped around by a cloud of subterfuges and fallacies.”

Leo XIII saw the “new order” of philosophy as a “dangerous” threat to the faith. Leo XIII encouraged a return to the sources, especially critical editions of the writings of St. Thomas. He mandated Catholic universities to “defend this doctrine.” According to Daly, Leo XIII wanted the “somewhat untidy philosophical eclecticism” of the nineteenth century replaced with “strict fidelity to the theological and philosophical system of St. Thomas Aquinas.” Teachers were to be carefully “selected” as pedagogues who would “endeavor to implant the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas in the minds of students.”

Advocates of the Neo-Scholastic method for Catholic Philosophy commended its ability to respond to the “many harmful methods” of modern philosophy. Emphasis on the external aspect of revelation prevented the reasonable philosopher from wandering too far into ontology, intuition, or immanence. By returning the Church to what they considered to be Thomistic thought, Neo-Scholastics were able to impede the advances of modernism in the Church.

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90 Leo XIII, Aeterni Patris, 29.
91 Leo XIII, Aeterni Patris, 31.
92 Daly, Transcendence and Immanence, 19.
93 Leo XIII, Aeterni Patris, 31.
94 Pius IX, Qui Pluribus, 4.
Theological Neo-Scholasticism

Leo XIII

While Leo XIII was calling for a return to Thomistic philosophy, he was also able to call for a concurrent return to pre-modern scriptural theology. In 1893, Leo XIII wrote the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, which provided instruction on how to study the Scriptures. The restorative resources of Catholic ecclesiology, not necessarily the full accuracy of Leo XIII’s description of Thomism, are the present attention of this dissertation. Due to Catholic ecclesiology, Leo XIII could authoritatively retrieve both medieval and patristic resources in an attempt to deal with modern philosophical and theological challenges. Catholic ecclesiology gave ancient voices a contemporary value. However, evangelicals have no such recourse. Princeton theologians could go back to Westminster or Calvin, but not much further. Due to their frequent dismissal of the Catholic Church, evangelicals usually did not have normative value for anything outside of the text of the Bible and the particular philosophy they were utilizing at any moment.

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95 Leo XIII demonstrates that mystical theology was not lost in Catholicism even during the prevalence of Neo-Scholastic methods. Even Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, well known for his insistence on Neo-Thomism, affirmed that “ascetical and mystical theology” were a “development on the treatise of the love of God and of that on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to show how they are applied, or to lead souls to divine union.” Cf. section 4, “The Object of Ascetical and Mystical Theology,” in Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life: Prelude of Eternal Life*, trans. Timothea Doyle (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1989; Kindle Book), introduction, location 340.


97 Cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Charles Scribner’s and Sons, 1918), 33–69. Warfield disparages claims of miracles in his chapter entitled “Patristic and Medieval Marvels.” Warfield claimed there was only one answer for multiple miracles claimed throughout Church history, beginning around the fourth century: The claims for miracles “represent an infusion of heathen modes of thought in the Church” (61). He argued that claims of the miraculous in Church history were a “transplantation of
Over the next two generations of internal polemics within each group, Catholic ecclesiology demonstrated restorative qualities which were absent in evangelicalism.

In *Providentissimus Deus*, Leo XIII asserted that the Bible was from God as an “infallible” testimony that God had given to his Church. Again, however, Leo XIII claimed that Scholastic methods of interpreting Scripture had refined and perfected the patristic reading of Scripture. Thomas, in particular, had subsumed the best of the patristic tradition. In Leo XIII’s view of church history, Thomas was the “prince of theologians.” For Leo XIII, Thomas did not bring anything new. Instead, Thomas helped restore the “ancient beauty” of the faith. The scattered teachings of “the disciples of the apostles” found in “their letters and their books,” as well as the multiplicity of later teachings found in various “Sees, Catechetical and Theological schools” were best interpreted and explained by the scholastics. “With the age of the scholastics came fresh and welcome progress in the study of the Bible.” For, it is “to them we owe the accurate and clear distinction, such as had not been given before, of the various senses of the sacred words.”

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98 Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 1.
99 Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 3.
100 Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 14.
101 Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 16.
103 Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 7.
104 Leo XIII * Providentissimus Deus*, 7.
Leo XIII emphasized the need for continuity in biblical interpretation, and the Catholic Church provided that possibility. For Leo XIII, the Church was the “supreme teacher of the peoples,” and was the construct of a “divine” architect.\(^\text{105}\) The Church was more than a random collection of followers of Jesus; its very structure was “instituted by Christ.”\(^\text{106}\) From the time of “Blessed Peter” until the present the Church’s bishops had sought to confirm their fellows in the faith.\(^\text{107}\) The “sovereign Pontiffs, the holy Fathers and the councils” “always” provided “the greatest assistance to “really and soundly understanding and interpreting the Scriptures.”\(^\text{108}\) The Scripture, which some hold to exclusively, was given by Christ to the Church under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.\(^\text{109}\) The same Spirit who gave the Bible also furnished the “Church, her institutions, her nature, her office, and her gifts.”\(^\text{110}\) For Leo, the constitutive relationship between Scripture and Church had always been in place, leading to the conclusion that the “Holy Scripture was safely interpreted by those who had the Apostolic succession.”\(^\text{111}\) God’s people have always believed that “God has delivered the Holy Scriptures to the Church, and that in reading and making use of His Word, they must follow the Church as their guide and their teacher.”\(^\text{112}\) “This cannot be done completely or satisfactorily except by

\(^{105}\) Leo XIII. *Aeterni Patris*, 1.

\(^{106}\) Leo XIII. *Aeterni Patris*, 5.

\(^{107}\) Leo XIII. *Aeterni Patris*, 1.

\(^{108}\) Leo XIII. *Aeterni Patris*, 15.

\(^{109}\) Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 1.

\(^{110}\) Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 3.

\(^{111}\) Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 14.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.
means of the living and proper Magisterium of the Church.”\textsuperscript{113} For Leo XIII, the Church was to be the judge of the true sense of the Scriptures. “It is most unbecoming to pass by, in ignorance or contempt, the excellent work which Catholics have left in abundance, and to have recourse to the works of non-Catholics, and to seek in them, to the detriment of sound doctrine and often to the peril of faith.”\textsuperscript{114} In his appeal to an ecclesial interpretation of Scripture, Leo XIII was expressing faith in the Scriptures and the Spirit behind the Bible. Christ had promised to “build”\textsuperscript{115} his Church, to be present in the Church until the end of the age, and to send the Spirit who would lead and guide the Church into all truth.\textsuperscript{116} For Leo XIII, both the original writing and the contemporary interpretation of the Scriptures needed to occur “under the assistance of the same Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{117}

**Manualistic Theology**

The Catholic Church implemented textbooks, known as “manuals”\textsuperscript{118} to express “fundamental” and “dogmatic”\textsuperscript{119} theology between the two Vatican councils. The Catholic Church used the manuals “above all”\textsuperscript{120} as “the major instrument”\textsuperscript{121} during the

\textsuperscript{113} Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 17.

\textsuperscript{114} Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 15.

\textsuperscript{115} Matthew 16:18.

\textsuperscript{116} John 16:13.

\textsuperscript{117} Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 14.

\textsuperscript{118} Daly, *Transcendence and Immanence*, 11–13.

\textsuperscript{119} Wicks, *Manualistic Theology*, 1102.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{121} Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 30.
modernist crisis. Most Catholic manuals were written in Latin, with translations furnished in several languages. The manuals emphasized that Scripture and Tradition contained propositional revelation. The role of theology was to deduce truth from those propositions.

Catholic manuals are often classified as “Neo-Scholastic,” because they developed under the influence of Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris*, with its endorsement of Thomas Aquinas.\(^{122}\) Jared Wicks, however, argues that the manuals “diverge considerably” from the universal “quest of wisdom” found in Thomas and other medieval works.\(^{123}\) Instead, it is argued, the development of the manuals can more accurately be traced to the influence of Melchoir Cano and other Spanish Scholastics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\(^{124}\) “The manuals are children of their own time, the age of positivism, and give pride of place to the amassing of data to support their conclusions.”\(^{125}\)

One purpose of manuals was to “explain in a clear and comprehensive manner every point of our holy faith.”\(^{126}\) While focusing on “objective historical criteria” for

\(^{122}\) Wicks, *Manualistic Theology*, 1104.

\(^{123}\) Ibid.


\(^{125}\) Wicks, *Manualistic Theology*, 1104.

\(^{126}\) McGovern, James J. *The Manual of the Holy Catholic Church; Embracing, First Part: The Beautiful Teachings of the Holy Catholic Church Simplified and Explained in the Form of Questions and Answers ... Second Part: Light from the Altar; Or, The True Catholic in the Church of Christ* (Chicago, IL: Catholic Art and Publication Office, 1906; PDF e-book). This quote is from the title page of Volume 1. The same title page claims the book contains “the whole” of the “beautiful teachings” of the Catholic Church, which are supported by “Fifteen hundred proofs from the sacred Scriptures.”
Catholic faith, the manuals, along with Pius X’s notably influential works of 1907,\textsuperscript{127} were primary instruments used to argue against and condemn “modernism.”\textsuperscript{128} The fundamental theology of the manuals focused its arguments on the nature of religion, the nature of revelation, convincing evidence that Jesus was the bearer of God’s revelation, demonstration that Jesus indeed founded the Catholic Church, and identification of the sources of revelation, which were Scripture and Church Tradition.\textsuperscript{129} According to Jared Wicks, argumentation was the centerpiece of the manuals.\textsuperscript{130} The purpose of the manuals was to demonstrate the credibility of Christian faith; they attempted to do this by highlighting objective proofs that Jesus really was who the Church claimed him to be, and that Jesus legitimized the claim through his miracles and prophecies fulfilled in his life. The manuals put forward the objective credibility of New Testament revelation, which forcefully imposed itself on the thinking person by the strength of “assembled evidence.”\textsuperscript{131} The rational person was brought to the threshold of faith by argumentation. However, the final step of faith was still the gracious work of God. In this way, the manuals were assumed to affirm both the rational and supernatural aspect of Christian belief.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{127} Lamentabili Sane and Pascendi Dominici Gregis.

\textsuperscript{128} Wicks, Manualistic Theology, 1103.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{132} Wicks, Manualistic Theology, 1103.
The manuals stressed propositional truth. Most manuals implied that God’s revelation was instruction about otherwise unattainable truths; God gave clear knowledge through his disclosure. Subsequently, advocates of manualistic theology frequently were hostile towards theologies which contained even a hint of understanding revelation under the principle of immanence. The advocates of the manuals feared that modernism shifted attention away from the supernatural and positive character of revelation, and moved it to subjective interiority. Immanence potentially blurred the distinctiveness of the transcendent realm.

In the dogmatic theology of the manuals, Wicks detected a “regressive” method. The manuals often began their arguments from the present day teaching of the Magisterium, and worked backwards to show how Scripture, Church Fathers, Councils, and medieval theologians were in agreement with the contemporary Church. In time, specific complaints were voiced regarding the narrow method of the manuals. For one, the manuals interpreted Scripture and Tradition in a way to satisfy present day doctrinal formulas. They subjected the past Tradition to contemporary conclusions. In addition, they neglected the richness of God’s saving revelation in Christ. Faith was theoretically reduced to submission to authority and assent to the best argument.

Revelation was limited to the past, and interpretation was restricted to understanding the

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133 Wicks, Manualistic Theology, 1103.

134 Wicks, Manualistic Theology, 1104.

135 Wicks provides examples of this in Pius XII’s Humani generis, 18 and 21.

136 Wicks, Manualistic Theology, 1104–1105.
past revelation.\textsuperscript{137} Instead of the manuals being used as intermediaries in peoples’ union with the living God by helping them understand Christ better, they themselves became the objects of faith.\textsuperscript{138} The manuals’ overt emphasis on objectivity and their apprehension over immanence made them incapable to show the connection between what arises in the human heart and God’s gift of life in the revelation of Christ.\textsuperscript{139} The Scripture’s invitation to communion with God and the human desire for that union were obscured.

\textbf{Mutual Suspicion}

When Catholic leadership stressed overconfidence in Neo-Scholasticism as a unitary method of thought, it created consternation in other Catholics. The universal Church could not afford to be insular in its time of great need! Several Catholic thinkers began to voice their contrariness with Neo-Scholasticism, claiming that Neo-Scholastic advocates did not see the narrow-mindedness of their own methods. In response, the Church leadership who was in favor of Neo-Scholasticism expressed suspicion towards those who promoted dissenting “modern” philosophical and theological methods. As a result of the crisis, some authors were disciplined by Church leadership, and others even excommunicated from the Catholic Church. To some observers, the Catholic Church appeared destabilized as a result of the penetrating effect of the various crises. However, despite the apparent undermining of its poise, the Catholic Church was able to resume its balance over the next two generations. To this reader, the Catholic Church’s ecclesiology

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{137} O’Collins, \textit{Second Vatican Council}, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Wicks, \textit{Manualistic Theology}, 1104.
\item \textsuperscript{139} Wicks, \textit{Manualistic Theology}, 1104–1105.
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was pivotal towards restoring stability. The events surrounding two Catholic authors who were critical of Neo-Scholastic methods supports this argument.

Maurice Blondel

French Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel (1861–1949) provided one of the most significant dissenting voices to the dominant Neo-Scholasticism at the turn of the century. His 1893 work *L’Action* was particularly pertinent to the Catholic Modernist Crisis. While remaining a “devoted and faithful Catholic,”140 Blondel was critical of the extrinsicism of the manuals. Through a philosophical method of immanence, Blondel argued that reason alone could not account for human action. For Blondel, human action demonstrated that people drive towards something beyond their capacities, which suggests that faith is needed for supernatural completion. Although Blondel’s works led to unwelcome hostilities directed toward him, even “philosophical excommunication,”141 he remained in the Church.

In his 1896 *Letter on Apologetics*, Blondel cautioned against recent “ingenious efforts to restore harmony” between science and philosophy. Specifically, “scholasticism” was attempting to show how current developments in the “positive sciences” “must” be brought into harmony with one another, and ultimately “bear witness to the truth of Dogma.”142 To Blondel, it was “asking too much of philosophy” to create

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142 Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics, And, History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Illtyd Trethowan (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 131. Both works are in this single binding. The following notes will distinguish which work is being referenced.
such a harmony. In the “efforts” of “Neo-Scholasticism,” Blondel saw both “splendid fruitfulness” and “incurable sterility.”

In a series of articles in 1903, Blondel noted the “conflict” between “two quite incompatible” modes of thought among two different groups of thinkers, whom he labeled “extrinsicists” and “historists.” The former group referred to Neo-Scholastics; the latter denoted modernists such as Alfred Loisy. “Since there cannot be two Catholicisms,” Blondel saw the tension as “abnormal.” Unhealthy conflicts “set Catholic against Catholic” throughout social, political, and philosophical spheres. Both sides in this conflict “believe in the inspiration of Scripture and the truth of positive revelation.” However, each side ended with “contrary conclusions” on fundamental issues such as the historical Jesus. In the end, they turn and “reproach one another with endangering religion.” For Blondel, the emphases of each group neglected humanity’s intrinsic impulses and need for the transcendent. Both groups separated the supernatural from the natural realm to such a degree that the human subject was insufficiently examined and religion became extraneous to the autonomous life of reason. Exclusive reliance upon external forms of knowing resulted in either a priori agnosticism or a posteriori

143 Blondel, Letter on Apologetics, 135.
144 Blondel, Letter on Apologetics, 174.
146 Blondel, History and Dogma, 222.
148 Blondel, History and Dogma, 222.
150 Blanchette, Why We Need Maurice Blondel, 145.
fideism.\textsuperscript{151} For Blondel, these deductive methods of thought were insufficient for the modern world.

According to Blondel, the methods exhibited in the manuals neglected the human subject, overly stressed concepts, and were therefore sterile. The conclusions of these methods were based on facts, but not lived experiences. For Blondel, reality was too complex to be comprehended within a single stream of thought, Neo-Scholastic or otherwise. Over-emphasis on the compelling quality of extrinsic facts neglected natural human desire which could only be completed by divine grace. It reduced the communication of divine truths to a one-sided imposition by God; there was no cooperation of human desire or intelligence.\textsuperscript{152} For Blondel, revelation did not come to humanity exclusively “from the outside like a completely empirical datum.”\textsuperscript{153} Blondel affirmed the ability of miracles to assert divine truths, but miracles could be “miraculous only in the eyes of those already prepared to recognize divine action.”\textsuperscript{154} The “force” of external proofs depended “on the fact that each one bears them within himself.”\textsuperscript{155} In a Neo-Scholastic worldview, convincing proofs for particular doctrines were to be uncovered in historical sources,\textsuperscript{156} such as Scripture, patristic writings, and conciliar

\textsuperscript{151} Daly, \textit{Transcendence and Immanence}, 17.


\textsuperscript{153} Blondel, \textit{Action}, 363.

\textsuperscript{154} Blondel, \textit{Action}, 365.

\textsuperscript{155} Blondel, \textit{Action}, 443.

\textsuperscript{156} McCool, \textit{Unity to Pluralism}, 24.
teachings which provided reliable testimony to what must be believed. Blondel’s problem with this view was it gave little attention to the constitution of the receiver of the revelation, the human person. For Blondel, this negligence could result in a robotic faith; people would believe merely because propositions were backed by authority without regard for the internal need of the subject.\(^{157}\) In addition, this reduced the value of human history in which revelation occurred. It was as if the real history surrounding a miraculous event “had never entered.”\(^{158}\) The “accidental, extrinsic, and generic character” of miracles was mentioned in manualist apologetics, but not the “original content” or “real relation” between the miracles and the lives who experienced them.\(^{159}\) While Blondel was careful not to discount the ability of miracles to provide verification of divine claims, he criticized the “incomplete use” that “some apologists” made of them.\(^{160}\) The new “Thomism,” for example, may appear to some as an “exact” account of reality, an “inventory” which provides assurance against all assaults and objections.\(^{161}\) However, for Blondel, it could not deal with advances in human thought. While modern society sought to understand itself, Neo-Thomists merely busied themselves with “refurbishing old arguments” about external objects.\(^{162}\)

\(^{157}\) Blondel, *History and Dogma*, 226.

\(^{158}\) Ibid.

\(^{159}\) Ibid.

\(^{160}\) Blondel, *History and Dogma*, 226, note.

\(^{161}\) Blondel, *Letter on Apologetics*, 146.

\(^{162}\) Ibid.
While Blondel received negative attention from Church authorities for his criticism of Neo-Scholasticism, he furnished a parallel critique of historicism. Historical positivism, such as seen in Loisy, would not entertain an understanding of the historical Jesus beyond what could be verified through empirical observation. The historicist assumed the religious and secular dimensions were at odds with each other, resulting in his search for “history and history alone.” Armed with his purely philological and historical skills, his sterile search for the historical Jesus would not allow contamination by dogma. Blondel complained that in such a system of thought the living actor in history was replaced with facts about Jesus; Christ’s person was exchanged for a portrait. Analyses of a chain of events satisfied the historicist while the understanding of the “initial operation of real beings” was dismissed. As a result, historicism could only provide a “mechanical explanation” of the complex, kaleidoscopic human experience with God through Jesus Christ. Historical facts were categorized, but narrow restrictions prevented the real persons who lived through those facts, and their interior motivations, from being addressed. For Blondel, neither rationalism nor historicism could sufficiently get at the “real Christ.”

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163 Blanchette, *Why We Need Maurice Blondel*, 141.


166 Blondel, *History and Dogma*, 244.

167 Loisy denied several of Blondel’s accusations. Specifically, Loisy rejected the claim that his own historical criticism put the whole weight of Christian faith on external evidences. However, he and others, including Friedrich von Hügel, defended the need for literary criticism to perform its task apart from faith. Religious claims could not be separated from their historic value, but the two needed to be distinguished. On historical grounds, Loisy was hesitant to assent to religious claims which were not verifiable.
Blondel sought to bring religion and philosophy back together by showing the necessity of the question of the supernatural. He argued that action begins with the natural human will to act in a certain manner when given multiple behavioral options to choose from; it begins in human subjectivity. Human action then extends into personal, social, and political expressions. Blondel developed a phenomenology which concluded that human action was insufficient to satisfy the dialectic of human willing. He perceived the human will to be striving beyond its temporal objects, and the natural order had no explanation for this driving impulse; the end of all activity was “always disappointed and always rising again.” After passing through “the immense field of the phenomenon,” a person realized that a “mystery” outlived him and his powers. People, through their actions, were seeking a secret to life that was “higher” than the vision of “Kant or Spinoza.” It was more than ethics or morality; it was beyond the domain of human science. “Rational critique and moral practice have a certain role of clearing out and preparing the way, but the living source is elsewhere than in them.” The “last idol” phenomena, such as the Virgin Birth and Resurrection. Blondel sought to vindicate the objectivity of Christian beliefs which could not be historically verified; Loisy basically admitted that the transcendent reality was historically unattainable. For Loisy, God was simply not a historical person. Cf. Daly, *Transcendence and Immanence*, 69–90.

168 Blanchette, *Why We Need Maurice Blondel*, 142, 145

169 Blanchette, *Why We Need Maurice Blondel*, 145–147.


of humanity was therefore the superstition of “self-sufficiency.” Blondel concluded that only the supernatural could complete a person. “Man cannot equal his own exigencies.” Human action could only be understood when viewed in relation to the supernatural order because “there is in man a life better than man.” Blondel countered the rationalistic notion that a relationship with the supernatural primarily proceeded from the top down. In his view, this neglected the natural upward movement of the human spirit; it failed to note the grace of God at work in human nature. Blondel’s apologetics of immanence argued that people were necessarily confronted with a free option, whether to accept the supernatural or not. However, the supernatural was not completely opaque. Christian revelation furnished the only meaningful answer to the exigencies of the human will.

For Blondel, Tradition was the “intermediary between history and dogma.” Tradition was distinct from texts and formulas, but it harmonized and organized them. For Blondel, Church Tradition was more than “historical facts, received truths, accepted teachings, hallowed practices and ancient customs.” Tradition stood in “contradistinction to the Scriptures, which relate the immediate testimony of the apostolic

175 Blondel, Action, 297.
176 Blondel, Action, 299.
177 Blondel, Action, 357.
178 Bernardi, Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, 239.
179 McCool, Unity to Pluralism, 44.
180 McCool, Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism, 250.
181 Blondel, History and Dogma, 264.
182 Blondel, History and Dogma, 265.
age.” Tradition was the “immense echo of oral revelation.” Tradition “discovers and formulates truths on which the past lived, though unable as yet to evaluate or define them explicitly.” Tradition bears fruit by putting the “total deposit” into “currency” little by little.” For Blondel, a study of history alone would “reduce” Catholicism’s criterion to “an extrinsic and accessory argument.” For Blondel, the truthfulness of “Catholicism” was “demonstrated” by more than history. Rather, through Tradition, Catholicism also “has within it a power of self-justification which is independent of historical proofs or moral probabilities.” To Blondel, “the Church is a proof of itself.” For this reason, the biblical exegete, in order to “pass from facts to dogma,” must achieve more than “an exact analysis of the texts.” He must also meditate on the “collective life, and the slow progressive labor of the Christian tradition.”

Throughout much of his career, Blondel was persistently criticized by fellow Catholics. Some were apprehensive that he was bringing a new form of Kantianism into the Church. In his “Testis” series, written almost two decades after L’Action, Blondel sought to connect the act of knowing with the subjectivity of the knower in an integral

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183 Blondel, History and Dogma, 266.
184 Blondel, History and Dogma, 267.
185 Blondel, History and Dogma, 260.
186 Blondel, History and Dogma, 269.
188 The term was becoming a catch-all phrase for anything modern that appeared overly subjective.
realism.\textsuperscript{189} Overall, his phenomenology of the human spirit\textsuperscript{190} threatened Thomistic theologians with an “illegitimate intrusion into their domain.”\textsuperscript{191} To the Neo-Scholastic, philosophy needed to stay on its own side of the fence like a congenial neighbor.

Blondel’s incursion into theology earned a hostile reception from some in the Church, similar to Bautain’s reception decades earlier.\textsuperscript{192} One such Thomist was Dominican M. B. Schwalm, who considered Blondel’s work as “heretical, erroneous, or recklessly rash.”\textsuperscript{193} Blondel was suspected of threatening the rational basis of faith, and depriving miracles of their probative value.\textsuperscript{194} Blondel’s critique of Loisy helped restore his reputation to some Catholic leaders, but others still presumed him to be a modernist.\textsuperscript{195} Some sought to place particular works of his on the Index.\textsuperscript{196} Although he was never condemned specifically, he was “delated” multiple times.\textsuperscript{197} Despite the suspicion Blondel endured, he was not an individualistic Protestant. He thought from the context of the living Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{198}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{190} McCool, \textit{Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism}, 250.
\item \textsuperscript{191} Oliva Blanchette, preface to Blondel’s \textit{Action}, xxiii.
\item \textsuperscript{192} McCool, \textit{Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism}, 54.
\item \textsuperscript{194} Daly, \textit{Transcendence and Immanence}, 43–44.
\item \textsuperscript{195} Bernardi, \textit{Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism}, 57.
\item \textsuperscript{196} Bernardi, \textit{Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism}, 55.
\item \textsuperscript{197} McCool, \textit{Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism}, 246.
\item \textsuperscript{198} At first, Blondel was ignorant of Tübingen theologians Drey and Möhler. Nor could he realize that Tübingen’s Romantic views were obscured over time by layers of scholasticism. Cf. Dru, introduction to Blondel, \textit{Letter on Apologetics, and History of Dogma}, 47–48.
\end{itemize}
Church Tradition, owing to ecclesiology, enabled him to uphold Church dogma while exploring modern thought.

Alfred Loisy

Alfred Loisy (1857–1940) was a French Catholic priest and biblical scholar who was later excommunicated. While a Catholic, Loisy was convinced the Church needed to translate Christian truth into modern terms; it was incumbent on Catholic scholars to present religious verities in forms appropriate to the contemporary mind. Loisy especially despised outdated “theorums” of the faith which were based on abstract scholastic speculation. Rather, modern theology needed to reestablish the faith in “reality.”

Through academic research, specifically historical criticism, Loisy sought to remedy inherited theological ailments in Catholic teaching, such as scholasticism. The direction he wished theology to travel was wide open to the horizon of historical science, and it frequently led him to relativize traditional dogma. Loisy’s desire for progressive theology is evident in his rebuff of Lutheran Adolph Harnack’s historical criticism.

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200 Quoted in Jodock, Catholicism Contending with Modernity, 169.

201 Loisy’s direction was not completely new, especially among Catholics in France. In 1863, Ernest Renan published his Vie de Jésus. Cf., Joseph E. Renan, Renan’s Life of Jesus, trans. William G. Hutchison (London: Walter Scott, 1897; PDF e-book). Renan was renowned as an authority on the Semitic languages and Oriental archaeology (introduction, ix). Renan’s principle sources for Vie de Jésus were the New Testament, Josephus, and miscellaneous secondary sources (introduction, xvi–ix). Renan claimed that “modifications” “purporting to be the true law of Moses” were added to the Torah by fanatical Jews (7). Regarding Christianity, Renan tried to separate the “religion” of Christianity from the “historic event” (1). Renan claimed that the disciples sought to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, which led them to “juggling” the words of the Old Testament in “an artificial and arbitrary manner,” not in “serious reasoning” (161–162). The disciples’ claims of miracles surrounding Jesus, such as the appearance of Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration, were not genuine. They were the result of “bad reasoning,” and rested on “very poor arguments” (163). To Renan, the story of Christ’s resurrection was the result of the disciples’ “enthusiasm” and Mary Magdalene’s “imagination” (271–272). Renan acknowledged the greatness of the Christian religion, but reduced much of it to a legend. As with ancient pagan “falsehoods,” “Nothing great has been founded that is not built upon a legend. In such cases the only culprit is mankind, which is willing to be
While Loisy was not content with the Catholic Church’s intellectual response to the needs of his generation, he also was aware of the need to reply to the attacks of liberal Protestants, such as Harnack. The Catholic Church’s understanding of the relation of Scripture, Church, and Tradition was being assaulted on scholarly grounds, resulting in a growing consensus that Christianity’s original jewels had been stolen years earlier. For many Protestants, the real Robber Barons were Catholic ecclesiastics who had confiscated Jesus’ original teachings and buried them under centuries of Hellenization. Although Loisy agreed that Tradition had woefully distorted the original message of Jesus, he argued that the only hope of getting at Jesus’ original teaching was nonetheless through the Catholic Tradition.

Adolf von Harnack sought to identify Christianity “solely in its historical sense.” Through his studies of Church dogma, he opened a “new approach” to historical critical studies of Scripture. His methods intentionally excluded “speculative reasoning” regarding religious concepts; his “purely historical” method paid no heed to the “apologist and the religious philosopher.” Instead, he wished to study the deceived” (160). An entire chapter (13) of Albert Schweitzer’s The Quest of the Historical Jesus was dedicated to analyzing the work of Renan. Schweitzer was complimentary at times, but often sarcastic towards Renan. Cf. Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, trans. W. Montgomery (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), 180–192. In addition, Schweitzer states that Renan ceased being a Catholic soon after he was removed from his professorship for his publication of Vie de Jésus (Schweitzer, 180–181). Unfortunately, this dissertation will not be able to give itself to tracing Schweitzer’s thought or the Quest for the Historical Jesus.


203 Bultmann, Rudolph, Introduction to Harnack’s What is Christianity?, x.

204 Harnack, What is Christianity?, 7–9.

205 Harnack, What is Christianity?, 7, 9.

206 Harnack, What is Christianity?, 6.
Gospels free from all theological overlays. In seeking to get at the real historical Jesus, Harnack admitted he only had a few reliable resources beyond the Synoptic Gospels and a few Pauline texts. The fourth gospel certainly was not an “historical authority,” and the remaining sources could be “easily put on a small sheet of paper, so little does it come to.” Even the Synoptics were not historically reliable because they were “composed for the work of evangelization.” “It is true” that miracles “do not happen;” however, Jesus may have done deeds that were “inexplicable” to the immediate audience, while still not supernatural.

Harnack argued that Christianity had developed over the centuries, with ideas far removed from the original intent of its namesake. Jesus never meant to found a church replete with dogma and authority. The simple message of the “whole Gospel” was in Jesus’ teaching of a loving God, our Father, who could become known to each individual soul as “my Father.” Jesus completely experienced the love of God, and he taught the Father’s love to others. Over time, ecclesiastical dogma, influenced by Hellenization, had burdened Jesus’ simple message of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of human beings. The loss of “the original, living element” of Christianity helped create a “Draconian” shape to the Christian religion. The upshot of Harnack’s emphasis on the individual soul’s experience of the Father’s love was that an organized church body

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210 Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 66.
211 Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 208.
became superfluous. For Harnack, original Christianity was a practical religious life, defined within the “sphere of the ethical.”\textsuperscript{212} The “practical proof” of Christ’s religion was not in theological dogma or Church structure, but “in the exercise of neighborly love and mercy.”\textsuperscript{213}

Harnack primarily valued the shelled corn of Christianity. He referred to the natural analogy of a kernel and husk\textsuperscript{214} when contrasting original and modern Christian faith. The contemporary exegete needed to get at the kernel of faith, the original kerygma of Jesus. In order to do this, centuries of ecclesiastical growth and decay, the husks, needed to be removed. The historian needed to extract what was meaningful for the modern world, and dispose of the useless husks. To Harnack, the early Christians, including Paul, did not seem to think it “desirable” to order their lives in “externals” of ecclesiastical organization.\textsuperscript{215} Considering Harnack’s lifelong context of the urban university, as he was the child of a professor,\textsuperscript{216} this reader thinks Harnack possibly neglected to realize that husks were essential to the life of the kernel, and that even the inner seed had a pericarp, an outer covering. Husk and kernel are inseparable for the

\textsuperscript{212} Harnack, \textit{What is Christianity?}, 73.

\textsuperscript{213} Harnack, \textit{What is Christianity?}, 75. Cf Daly, \textit{Transcendence and Immanence}, 67–68.

\textsuperscript{214} Cf., for example, Harnack, \textit{What is Christianity?}, 2–4, 8, 14–15.

\textsuperscript{215} Harnack, \textit{What is Christianity?}, 169.

\textsuperscript{216} Harnack’s father, Theodosis Harnack, was professor of practical and systematic theology for several years, first at Dorpat (now Tartu), Estonia, and then Erlangen, Germany. Cf. Wilhelm Pauck, “Adolf Von Harnack,” \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica Online}, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255617/Adolf-von-Harnack.
maintenance of life. It seems to this reader that Loisy, the son of a farmer, possibly snagged Harnack on this agricultural analogy.

For Loisy, the honest “historian” will “find that the essence of Christianity has been more or less preserved in the different Christian communions.”

“Herr Harnack peels his fruit with such perseverance, that the question arises if anything will remain at the end.” For Loisy, the essence of Christianity was discovered in its full life, not just its primitive origins. The entire traditional life of the Church needed to be analyzed. Contrary to Harnack, Loisy taught that living Tradition, not just literary fragments, was necessary to get at the real Jesus. Harnack had erred by imagining that historic Christian development was extrinsic and therefore unnecessary to the Gospel. Loisy distinguished himself from Harnack and other Protestants by critiquing their individualistic understanding of Christianity. “An invisible society formed forever of those who have in their hearts faith in the goodness of God” was hardly an accurate historical image of the message of Jesus. It was obvious to Loisy that Jesus at least had a “rudiment of a social organization,” “a society,” in mind.

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221 Daly, *Transcendence and Immanence*, 56.

222 Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, 166.
Despite Loisy’s criticism of Harnack, he ultimately seemed to use his Protestant counterpart as an opportunity to address his complaints with his own Roman Catholic Tradition. “Every jibe at Harnack was a blade thrust at the Roman theologians.”

Loisy’s *Gospel and the Church* was a critique of Protestant liberalism, but it also appeared to be Loisy’s attempt to encourage Catholicism to be more progressive. The Church needed to change in order to be suitable for its modern audience. It was this implicit thrust in his criticism of Harnack that got Loisy into trouble with the Vatican leaders.

In his criticism of Harnack, Loisy confessed that it is “often difficult to distinguish between the personal religion of Jesus and the way in which his disciples have understood it.” “In the Gospels there remains but an echo, necessarily weakened and a little confused, of the words of Jesus.”

In effect, Loisy argued that there were two gospels: the first was the original religion of Jesus; the second was the apostolic witness in the New Testament. “The mission of Christ” was not presented in the Gospels in its “primitive form.” Instead, the “natural tendency” of Tradition idealized Christ’s “discourses and his acts” even among his first followers. Loisy perceived that a natural evolutionary process of gospel and Church had occurred since the beginning of Christianity. The current Church was not Jesus’ original plan, but it was a natural outgrowth of the gospel. “Jesus foretold the kingdom, and it was the Church that came:

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she came, enlarging the form of the gospel, which it was impossible to preserve as it was, as soon as the Passion closed the ministry of Jesus.”

Loisy’s polemic implied that while the contemporary Catholic Church mistakenly assumed it thundered with the original voice of Christ, it only imitated a faint echo. The original religion of Jesus was distinct from the earliest traditions contained in the New Testament, and the distortion increased in the Church during subsequent generations. Loisy nearly concluded on the impossibility of getting at the original religion of Jesus through Tradition, but he did not. He argued that although contemporary Church Tradition was different from Jesus’ original teachings, it remained the primary way to get at any understanding of Jesus’ religion. In this, he differed from Harnack.

Loisy angered his Catholic superiors when he wrote that “Jesus did not systematize beforehand the constitution of the Church as that of a government established on earth and destined to endure for a long series of centuries.” The idea of an organized institution replete with dogma and teaching authority was an embellishment of Jesus’ simple vision. Loisy referred to Jesus’ eschatological preaching to buttress his argument. Jesus’ kingdom “regards, and can only regard, the future.” How could Jesus have meant to establish an institutional Church when it appears that he was entirely

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228 Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, 166.
focused on the next world? The most plausible explanation for Loisy was that the Church was not in Jesus’ original intentions.

Loisy rejected Harnack’s diminution of Jesus’ person in the earliest traditions. Harnack had argued that the earliest Christian teaching focused solely on the Father’s love, not the person of Jesus. Unlike Harnack, Loisy argued that “everything assumes” a “relation to the Messiah, and all contributes to prove that Jesus was the Christ.”

However, in criticizing Harnack, Loisy demonstrated how he wished the Catholic Church would recognize its own need to update its dogmatic forms. For Loisy, the Church needed to re-formulate its teaching in accord with the conceptual forms of each era and culture. For Loisy, Christian dogmas essentially evolved over time, and were even legitimate appendices to the teaching of Jesus. These developments were reasonable because they “proceed from the gospel.” However, the final formulae were not historically taught by Jesus. At this point, Loisy’s Christology alarmed the leaders at the Vatican. Loisy taught that Jesus was not conscious of his own divinity.

Loisy taught that early belief in Jesus as the Messiah gradually developed over centuries into “Christological dogma.” Christ never “gave himself out” as God, and “displayed no consciousness whatever of being divine.” It was the later Church leaders who formed the doctrine of Christ’s divinity. The teaching was not from Jesus, and

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certainly not in his consciousness. The Hellenizing concept of Logos in the fourth Gospel “enlarges the formula of faith, and changes its own nature,” but it was not taught by Christ. The idea of Logos was beneficial to conveying the message of Jesus to the “whole pagan world,” but it was not what Jesus originally taught.

Loisy’s critical study of history gave him hope for the future. Loisy did not necessarily disparage the gradual Christological development within the Church; he saw it as a natural evolution, culturally appropriate for the time. Instead, he had hoped that the modern Catholic, upon realizing the actual history of events, would again be open to new development. For Loisy, the Church needed to again progress in its dogmatics. “Neither Christological dogma nor the dogma of grace nor that of the Church” should be expected to remain unchanged, “firmer than the rock.” Dogmas were not “truths fallen from heaven.” Although they were sourced in the divine teachings of Jesus, “they are human in structure and composition.” Going forward, which Loisy had hoped Catholicism would do, “it is inconceivable that their future should not correspond to their past.” They changed in ancient times; they needed to change again. Without surprise, the only part of the Apostles Creed that Loisy could historically assent to was that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate.

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234 Loisy, The Gospel and the Church, 190.


236 Loisy, The Gospel and the Church, 210–211.

237 Loisy, The Gospel and the Church, 211.

238 Ratté, Three Modernists, 45.
Disciplinary Responses

The growing concern over Blondel and Loisy, and multiple other Catholic thinkers, prompted formal action by the Vatican. Due to their criticisms of scholastic abstractions, many modern thinkers were broadly accused of Kantian agnosticism. Church dogma was jeopardized, and appreciably through the philosophy of immanence.

Pius X’s July, 1907 *Lamentabili Sane* marked out errors made by Catholic thinkers which were “daily spread among the faithful.” The sad fact was that “many Catholic writers” had gone “beyond the limits determined by the Fathers and the Church.” “In the name of higher knowledge and historical research” these teachers strove for the “progress of dogma,” but only “corrupted” it and the people. Among the errors was the assumption that “scientific exegesis” was “more accurate” than Church teaching, and was not subject to ecclesiastical law. The Church’s Magisterium was no longer the custodian for biblical interpretation; it lay in the hand of the exegete. The “organic constitution of the Church” was actually mutable; it was subject to “perpetual evolution.” Without a divinely ordered Church, doctrine became relativized. “Scientific progress demands that the concepts of Christian doctrine concerning God, creation, revelation, the Person of the Incarnate Word, and Redemption be re-

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240 Pius X. *Lamentabili Sane*, preface.


adjusted.” [244] In the end, “modern Catholicism can be reconciled with true science only if it is transformed into a non-dogmatic Christianity; that is to say, into a broad and liberal Protestantism.” [245]

Two months later, Pius X’s encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* specifically identified the enemy who had infiltrated the camp: modernism, the “synthesis of all errors.” The terms “modernism” or “modernist” appear over one hundred times in the *Pascendi* text, and were confidently employed as “commonly used and rightly called” terms. [246] The agnosticism of modernist philosophers claimed “ignorance” whether God had in fact intervened in human history. [247] The thinking person was deflated; he was no longer able to use his reason to lift himself “up to God” through observing the material world. This was because the modernists limited their resources; their scientific research only allowed observable facts regarding phenomena, leaving the possibility of God “utterly excluded.” [248] The result of this agnosticism was that the credibility of natural theology and confidence in external revelation were demolished. The agnosticism of the modernist philosopher led to the formulation of vital, or “religious immanence.” [249] The human consciousness exhibited a need for God, implying the reality of the divine, which grew up into actual religion. Once the limits of human consciousness and science were

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244 Pius X, *Lamentabili Sane*, 64.

245 Pius X, *Lamentabili Sane*, 65


248 Ibid.

reached, the person came face to face with the “unknowable.” At this point, a leap into the darkness of fideism occurred, finally connecting the person with God.250 One dangerous conclusion of this process was that “all existing religions are equally true.”251 All people who were spurred on by the same generic inner impulse were equally valid in their conclusions.

The modernists, due to their conviction that religious thought was the consequence of a primitive “species of impulse or necessity,” gave the inner sentiment primacy in religion. The results were devastating: dogma became categorized as a secondary value in religion;252 the Bible became a “collection of experiences;” inspiration was now sourced in the individual;253 the Church was reduced to the vital presence of a “society of individual consciences.” In all, the Catholic Church was stripped of its “triple authority” of discipline, dogma, and liturgy.254 In many ways, Catholic modernists were like “liberal Protestants” who rejected “all external worship” and “external religious community” in favor of an “individual religion.”255 The encyclical uses the term “system,” in the singular, multiple times throughout the document. The assumption was that modernism was a “synthesis of all heresies.”256 The original nest of this evil beast

250 Pius X, Pascendi, 7.
251 Pius X, Pascendi, 15.
252 Pius X, Pascendi, 21.
253 Pius X, Pascendi, 22.
254 Pius X, Pascendi, 23.
255 Pius X, Pascendi, 25.
256 Pius X, Pascendi, 39.
was hidden in curiosity and pride. The remedy was obvious: Scholasticism, especially “that which the Angelic Doctor has bequeathed to us.” The encyclical called upon seminaries and dioceses to vigilantly uphold scholastic principles. Publications were to be monitored, and censorship enforced.

In 1910, Pius X followed up his encyclical with the requirement of *The Oath Against Modernism*, to which allegiance was to be sworn by “all clergy, pastors, confessors, preachers, religious superiors, and professors in philosophical-theological seminaries.” The *Oath* affirmed five basic convictions: that God could be known with certainty “by the natural light of reason from the created world;” that miracles and prophecy were the “surest signs” of the authenticity of the Christian faith; that the Church, as the “guardian and teacher of the revealed word,” was “personally instituted by the real and historical Christ;” that the faith in its modern form was the same as was first passed down from the apostles; that “faith is not a blind sentiment of religion welling up from the depths of the subconscious under the impulse of the heart and the motion of a will trained to morality; but faith is a genuine assent of the intellect to truth received by hearing from an external source.” The *Oath* concluded that Catholic dogma is the same

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“absolute and immutable truth preached by the apostles from the beginning;” it may not be “tailored according to what seems better and more suited to the culture of each age.”

The Oath Against Modernism was in place for nearly six decades, until it was suspended in 1967. The victory had been secured against modernism, but at a high cost.

Blondel was never excommunicated, nor were his books put on the Index. However, he was delated and watched with suspicion. For Loisy, the end was more severe. Even back in the 1890s, Alfred Loisy assumed his days were numbered in the Catholic Church. He could not reconcile himself with the doctrines and beliefs of the Church, and he saw little hope they would heed his advice to progress. He was excommunicated in March, 1908. Loisy’s “grave errors” which especially received condemnation regarded his views on “primitive revelation, the authenticity of the Gospel facts and teachings, the divinity and the supernatural knowledge of Christ, the resurrection” of Christ, as well as “the divine institution of the Church and the sacraments.” Loisy’s excommunication was the most severe, with Pope Pius X using the term vitandus. Beyond his removal from the priesthood, he was to be shunned in Church circles. Loisy wrote that his excommunication actually set him free. His only regret was that it “had arrived twenty years too late.”

Although this reader might be sympathetic towards some of what Blondel was trying to do, and saddened that Loisy apparently lost his faith, the purpose here is to

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263 Pius X, Moto Proprio Sacrorum Antistitum: The Oath, 1.


265 Loisy, My Duel with the Vatican, 248.

266 Loisy, My Duel with the Vatican, 319.
assess the long term value of ecclesiology. To this reader, there seems to be a restorative effect of ecclesiology. It appears that living Tradition can be a positive tool for biblical interpretation, and even contribute to the long term stability of the fellowship. Although this is not always evident in the heat of debate, it often emerges over time. The unintentional reduction of Tradition to facts or observable historical criteria, such as the manuals sometimes displayed, risked neglecting the contemporary Church and confining revelation to the past. Those who discarded Tradition, such as Harnack, limited their field of vision to only include what they considered to be historical. Those who assumed that progressive Tradition fundamentally included discontinuity, such as Loisy, downgraded the authoritative voice of Jesus to a distant echo. Through the back-and-forth polemics over generations, and even discipline which at times appeared to be unjust, ecclesiology exhibited the ability to stabilize the Catholic Church.

**Catholic Ressourcement: Henri de Lubac**

The influence of Neo-Scholasticism and debate over its adequacy continued well into the twentieth century, even until the Second Vatican Council. The *Ressourcement* movement in the 1930s and 1940s reacted against Neo-Scholasticism, and furnishes an example of the restorative effect of Catholic ecclesiology. The *Ressourcement* movement was dubbed by its critics “la Nouvelle Théologie,”

267 but those in the movement did not appreciate the title.268 Instead, they saw their work as “rediscovering Christianity in its

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267 As an example, Father Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange’s widely known 1946 article in the *Angelicum* was entitled “Where is the New Theology Leading us?” Susan Wood claims the term was first used in 1942 by Monsignor Pietro Parente (Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* [Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998], 6).

plentitude and in its purity.” Ressourcement theologians claimed they were not seeking
to retrieve pristine Christian faith; they were not attempting to return to Christianity’s
past, but to its center. They drew on patristic “treasures,” which they said were being
“so little utilized,” in order to address the needs of the contemporary Church.

David Schindler argues that the prevailing European ethos at the time was secular;
Christianity had lost authentic contact with society and God was absent from the heart of
human culture. The Church and the modern world were estranged as Catholic theology
was exiled from contemporary streams of thought. Worse, as one theologian said, the
insulation between Church and society was partly “our own fault.” A “purely extrinsic
and secular conception of Catholicism or our salvation,” as taught by Neo-Scholastics
and the manuals, led to a “grievously mistaken” understanding of the “essence of
Catholicism.” In order to genuinely respond to the current need, the Ressourcement, as
the name suggests, sought to rediscover the living essence of Christianity in its historic
roots.

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272 Schindler, introduction to The Mystery of the Supernatural, xi.

273 de Lubac, Catholicism, 16.

274 Ibid.
The *Ressourcement* began in France prior to World War II, and it ultimately influenced the Second Vatican Council. Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) was a significant participant in the *Ressourcement*. Various other authors have been associated with the movement in different ways, including Marie-Dominique Chenu, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Yves Congar. These authors did not necessarily operate within a coordinated school of thought, but they all sought to intentionally engage the contemporary world with the fullness of Christian faith. Pertinent to this dissertation, de Lubac sought to retrieve the spiritual sense in biblical interpretation with the hope of effecting renewal.

De Lubac, Ecclesiology, and Exegesis

The retrieval of the spiritual senses of biblical exegesis by de Lubac reflected his understanding of the relation between nature and the supernatural. At the heart of de Lubac’s concern with Neo-Scholastics and the manuals was that they exacerbated the tragic modern break between secular and sacred. Many were “grievously mistaken” about the social essence of Catholicism, holding to a “purely extrinsic and secular” conception. De Lubac sought out the historical reasons why nature and supernatural, the two orders of reality, were disconnected in peoples’ minds. De Lubac argued that the concept of “pure nature” had intensified over centuries, partly as a Baroque misreading of

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277 de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 16.
Aquinas, and was at the root of the modern dilemma.\textsuperscript{278} For de Lubac, one reason for the development of the idea of pure nature involved Cajetan, the great commentator on Thomas.\textsuperscript{279} De Lubac argued that the idea of pure nature was used as early as Cajetan to reference humanity’s natural end prior to God’s gift of grace. In this system of thought, humanity did not have a natural desire for God; it could not strive beyond its natural state. In what de Lubac considered an innovative interpretation of Thomas, Cajetan stated that a human could only have \textit{telos} for what naturally belonged to him;\textsuperscript{280} the desire to see God “face to face” could not be a natural human desire, but could only be in a person who was enlightened by revelation.\textsuperscript{281} Referencing Baius, de Lubac said that in such a mistaken concept, the “divine Architect” needed to construct a “second story,” a “supernature,” on top of the lower human nature.\textsuperscript{282} Although de Lubac could appreciate the distinction between the two orders, he thought that Cajetan’s model threatened the integrated relation between the two orders. For de Lubac, although the natural and


\textsuperscript{279} Bernard Mulcahy, \textit{Aquinas’s Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac: Not Everything Is Grace} (New York: P. Lang, 2011), 3. Mulcahy’s work critiques much of de Lubac’s thesis. For Mulcahy, the idea of “pure nature” can be defined different ways. Not only was an idea of pure nature in Thomas, but it also preceded Thomas in various patristic authors. For example, Thomas maintained that death was both natural and unnatural; immortality, therefore, if a gift naturally extrinsic to humanity (203). Mulcahy argues that repudiating the idea of pure nature works against natural law. If there were no pure nature, then people would be incapable to come to valid conclusions about morality and human fulfillment without special revelation. Non-Christians would be hopelessly incapable to understand what it means to be human (213–214).

\textsuperscript{280} de Lubac, \textit{Augustinianism}, 114.

\textsuperscript{281} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{282} de Lubac, \textit{Augustinianism}, 234.
supernatural aspects of humanity were “distinguished” from each other, they ought not be severely separated. With Augustine as his representative, he argued that humanity and its beatific end had always been perceived among Catholic thinkers as “entirely supernatural.” De Lubac specifically attacked extrinsic understandings of grace based on the works of Augustine. Similarly, St. Thomas had taught that humanity had a single beatitude.

De Lubac notes that some reputable theologians, even near the time of Cajetan, did not creatively read a pure nature into Thomas’ works as had Cajetan. And several who preceded Thomas or were his contemporaries wrote in a manner that contradicted Cajetan’s interpretations. Neither Augustine, Thomas himself, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, nor Duns Scotus would have “ever envisaged” humanity having more than

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284 de Lubac, *Augustinianism*, 82.


286 de Lubac, *Augustinianism*, 189. De Lubac’s citation in the English translation is not entirely clear. He appears to be referring to Book IV, dist. 49, qu. 1, ad. 4, (found on p. 6, lines 62–69 of http://dhspriory.org/thomas/Sent4d49q1a3.pdf), instead of what is listed in footnote 22, page 189 of *Augustinianism*: IV Sent., d. XLIX, qu. 1, art. 1, sol. 4. Cf. Aquinas, Thomas. *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica*, vol. 2, IaIIae, qu. 3, art. 2, ad quartum, 596–597. Aquinas says that “happiness is the last end,” “supreme perfection,” and quoting Aristotle, “the perfect good.” For Aquinas, “happiness signifies some final perfection.” Although people “cannot attain” perfect happiness in this life and will only attain it “in heaven,” they still strive for it. The supernatural is desired by the natural human. For de Lubac, this suggested that Neo-Scholastics erred by insisting on a pure nature which had no desire beyond its own nature. Evangelicals make a similar mistake when they emphasize the consequences of depravity to such a degree that human nature loses God’s image and its desire for beatitude. In this evangelical view, revelation becomes a violent crashing-in of a foreign deity into an autonomous human domain; and, salvation becomes robotic acceptance of “irresistible” grace, offered to the recipient while he is in some sort of hypnotic trance, unable to naturally desire to say, “Yes” and incapable of saying, “No.”

a single end, consisting of "knowledge of God other than the beatific vision."\footnote{de Lubac, \textit{Augustinianism}, 128–129. Also, cf. de Lubac’s note 115, where he lists direct quotes of Thomas which suggest his view that humanity had a single end.}

Nonetheless, the overwhelming consensus by the early twentieth century was to accept Cajetan’s interpretation of Aquinas almost without reservation.\footnote{Cf. Mulcahy, \textit{Aquinas’s Notion of Pure Nature}, 3. Mulcahy also lists political and social reasons behind the development of the idea of pure nature. The Reformation and Wars of Religion in Europe, as well as the crises in Spanish and Portuguese colonies, led theologians, especially Dominicans, in search of theologies that would result in the well-being of local indigenous peoples. An idea of a pure, human nature could be used to affirm the dignity of non-Christians in various colonies. It could be used to promote "social and legal edifices" that would promote peace in a pluralistic society.} According to de Lubac, Cajetan’s two-tiered interpretation of Thomas, as was seen in the polemics with Jansensism, influenced several theologians over the centuries,\footnote{Cf. Louis Dupré’s summary of de Lubac’s understanding of the Jansensist controversies in Introduction to \textit{Augustinianism}, xi- xii. Cf. de Lubac’s two chapters on the topic in \textit{Augustinianism}, 31–86.} including modern Neo-Scholastics and manualists. Emphasis was disproportionately laid on the external, objective aspect of revelation. As a result, theology was often reduced to mining Scripture and Church Tradition for facts; the integration between literal and spiritual meaning in the text of Scripture was lost. Consequently, for de Lubac, Christianity was frequently viewed as irrelevant to a secular world which was increasingly self-aware. De Lubac’s use of historical theology was a counter to the "univocal" approach of Catholic theology in his day; de Lubac attempted to recover the full breadth of patristic tradition.\footnote{Cf. David Grumett, “Henri de Lubac: Looking for Books to Read the World,” in \textit{Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-century Catholic Theology}, ed. Flynn and Murray, 238.}

In his hermeneutics, de Lubac analogously emphasized the unity between different levels of meaning in the biblical text, as well as unity between the text of the Bible and other elements of the Christian faith. He surveyed multiple patristic and
medieval theologians to argue that they too saw an integration of literal and spiritual in the biblical text. Specifically, de Lubac coordinated ecclesiology with biblical exegesis. In doing this, he was able to construct a hermeneutic which he considered relevant to his generation, but which did not succumb to a rationalistic use of historical critical methods.\footnote{Susan K. Wood provides a helpful list of five points of correspondence between Ressourcement theologians and biblical exegesis. Cf. Wood, \textit{Spiritual Exegesis}, 17–26.}

For de Lubac, the nature of the Church required that biblical exegesis must always occur in the Church.\footnote{Wood, \textit{Spiritual Exegesis}, 18.} The Church was singular, and “not to be confused with an aggregate.”\footnote{de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 48.} For de Lubac, the term “catholic” references “an intrinsic feature” of the Church; it suggests the Church’s spiritual nature, not only its material makeup. The term transcended geography and statistics. When the Church was only found in a small room in Jerusalem, it was catholic; it would remain catholic tomorrow if vast numbers of her faithful succumbed to apostasy.\footnote{de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 49.} For this reason, interpretation of the biblical text could not be regional. The universal Church naturally calls for a unitary rule of faith.

The Church was the mystery of Christ on earth. De Lubac makes a strong connection between Christology and ecclesiology; Monophysitism was a danger to both.\footnote{de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 75.} The Church had both a spiritual and a human nature; a “fatal” consequence will result from neglecting either of those realities. As a visible body, the Church can be
concretely recognized, just as Jesus was identified.\textsuperscript{297} The Church’s “hierarchy” was a “juridical constitution” which crystallized, organized, and guided its activities.\textsuperscript{298} However, the Church was also an “abstraction.”\textsuperscript{299} It was more than a “hierarchical and disciplined body,” whose apostolic succession demonstrated its “divine origin.”\textsuperscript{300} “The Church is for us the sacrament of Christ; she represents him in the full and ancient meaning of the term; she really makes him present.”\textsuperscript{301} For de Lubac, although one should never believe in the Church in the same sense as he believes in God, one must nonetheless understand that the Church is the Body of Christ, the presence of Christ, on the earth today.\textsuperscript{302}

The mystery of the Church was evidenced in various ways for de Lubac. He argued that “Catholicism is essentially social.”\textsuperscript{303} Yet, he said that its social aspect was two-fold. On one hand, it was certainly one of several “natural institutions”\textsuperscript{304} in human society. Its people constituted a formally recognized organization. On the other hand, it

\textsuperscript{297} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 73. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa’s quote on this page: “He who beholds the Church really beholds Christ.”


\textsuperscript{299} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 74.

\textsuperscript{300} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 76.

\textsuperscript{301} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{302} Ibid. And de Lubac, \textit{The Splendor of the Church}, 31.

\textsuperscript{303} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 15.

\textsuperscript{304} Ibid.
was social “in the heart of its mystery.”\textsuperscript{305} It was formed by the Spirit,\textsuperscript{306} and was the “meeting place of all mysteries.”\textsuperscript{307} In Christ, all of the Church’s “dogmas are bound up together,”\textsuperscript{308} its sacraments “are instruments of unity,”\textsuperscript{309} its ancient scriptures and “liturgical texts” nourish its people,\textsuperscript{310} grace is distributed to each “member of that great body,”\textsuperscript{311} all history is interpreted anew,\textsuperscript{312} the two testaments are seen in a unified view,\textsuperscript{313} and the internal mystery of the human race is encountered.\textsuperscript{314} For de Lubac, the mystery of the Church also had practical ramifications for hermeneutics.

The Bible, which was written in community, needed to be read in that same community. There was no room for private interpretation, and schism was seen as “an attack on the very unity of God.”\textsuperscript{315} This highlighted the formal role of Tradition. For de Lubac, Tradition was the constitutive thinking of the Christian community.\textsuperscript{316} The exegete must strive to be “faithfully bound to the apostles;” he must “accept and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{305} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{306} de Lubac, \textit{The Splendor of the Church}, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{307} de Lubac, \textit{The Splendor of the Church}, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{308} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 48.
\item \textsuperscript{309} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 82.
\item \textsuperscript{310} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 93.
\item \textsuperscript{311} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 112.
\item \textsuperscript{312} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 166.
\item \textsuperscript{313} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 170–171.
\item \textsuperscript{314} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 75.
\item \textsuperscript{315} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 77.
\item \textsuperscript{316} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 18.
\end{itemize}
understand” the Scriptures as Tradition teaches.\textsuperscript{317} Put simply, the Scriptures needed to be read “through the eyes of tradition.”\textsuperscript{318} “The first rule of hermeneutics” had always been “orthodoxy.”\textsuperscript{319} For de Lubac, as with Origen, the purpose of spiritual exegesis was to elucidate Scripture according to the rule of faith established in the succession of the apostles.\textsuperscript{320} Like Möhler, de Lubac viewed the ancients as his contemporaries with whom he had to reckon. This was the logical conclusion if the Church was the singular and living Body of Christ, the sacrament of Christ’s presence, and if the Bible was from the beginning the book of the Church.

An ecclesial reading of the biblical text guided de Lubac to a Christocentric reading.\textsuperscript{321} “The whole Christian Fact is summed up in Christ.”\textsuperscript{322} As the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets,\textsuperscript{323} “Jesus Christ brings about the unity of Scripture.”\textsuperscript{324} However, Christ’s fulfillment went beyond words or propositions. Christ, as God’s full revelation, fulfilled the Scripture through his “action.”\textsuperscript{325} Prior to propositionally explaining to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus how he fulfilled the Scripture, he actually brought

\textsuperscript{317} de Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 76. Origen’s quotes are from \textit{Homilies in Leviticus}, 7, 4.

\textsuperscript{318} de Lubac, \textit{The Splendor of the Church}, 15.


\textsuperscript{320} de Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 73.

\textsuperscript{321} Wood, \textit{Spiritual Exegesis}, 22–23.

\textsuperscript{322} de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 173.

\textsuperscript{323} Cf. Matthew 5:17.

\textsuperscript{324} de Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, vol. 1, 237.

\textsuperscript{325} de Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, vol. 1, 238.
about the change. His cross, therefore, was the “sole and universal key” to understanding God’s revelation. Within Christianity, a “natural bias” had always brought the Christian’s thoughts “to the contemplation of the cross.” Christ’s actual death and resurrection united the two testaments “into a single body of doctrine, intermingling the ancient precepts with the grace of the Gospel.” The upshot of this was that the goal of the biblical exegete could not be limited to an assemblage of diverse facts or varied propositions. Rather, it needed to strive for the One in whom all truths existed. Exegesis “does not consist in ideas, but it communicates the very reality of the One whose riches are unfathomable.” “This is how the spiritual understanding” of Scripture has “always been understood in the Church.” De Lubac sought to return exegesis to its proper Christological center, but it was his Catholic ecclesiology which helped provide him with direction.

A reminder of the nature of de Lubac’s writings is helpful. De Lubac acknowledged that his work was not the “technical” production of a historian, an apologist, or even a textual scholar. Nor did he seek to draw conclusions fit for “social

327 de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 1, 239.
328 de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 367.
329 de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 1, 239. Here, de Lubac references quotes from Augustine and Peter Damian.
332 de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 16, 19.
reform.” Instead, he wrote as a theologian; his concerns rested in the “implications of dogma.” His acknowledgement helps explain why his works emphasized the spiritual interpretation of Scripture significantly more than historical critical methods. In his context, he was alarmed at the “total secularization” in biblical studies, and he sought to avoid the hypnotizing effect of an exclusively “critical method.” However, he did admit that the “first” concern of the biblical exegete must be to establish the actual history of the text. He affirmed the foundational role of critical historical studies in theology. History was the “necessary interpreter between God and man;” “God acts in history and reveals himself in history.” Therefore, the interpreter of Scripture must give history a sacred “consecration;” he is “compelled to treat it with due respect” during the process of scriptural exegesis.

De Lubac’s polemics were often directed towards theologies, including Neo-Scholasticism and Protestant liberalism, which stressed the extrinsic nature of exegesis to such a degree that they risked missing the full sense of the sacred Scriptures. For de Lubac, “theology” could never be “clearly separated from exegesis.” Spiritual exegesis

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333 de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 16.

334 Ibid.


338 de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 166.

339 de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 165. Providing history a sacred “consecration” can be, of course, quite difficult for the evangelical Dispensationalist.

was a necessary, but “so little utilized,”

aspect of biblical interpretation. The “profound sense” of historical events could only be understood “in a spiritual manner.”

“Faith must provide the needed answer, and must do so before it is too late to be of help to many.”

The spiritual interpretation of Scripture neither “eliminates” the literal sense of biblical passages, nor “adds something to it. Instead, it “rounds it out” and gives it its fullest meaning.

De Lubac’s response to misunderstandings and possible mistreatment of himself by Catholic authorities is telling of his ecclesiology. His troubles with the Vatican authorities are well known. His Neo-Scholastic opponents, such as Garrigou-Lagrange, accused him of advocating a “new theology” which potentially destroyed the gratuity of the supernatural order. Some of de Lubac’s works were withdrawn from Catholic libraries and bookshops, and he was subjected to a heavy vetting process prior to any future publications. One author significantly noted that de Lubac “accepted without question the restrictions placed on his intellectual freedom.”

In time, however, his reputation changed. It became evident that his writings were not necessarily contrary to the Catholic Church, but actually expanded the understanding of theological anthropology. Catholic esteem for him is evident in the opportunity given to him to serve

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342 de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 165.
343 de Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, preface, xxxvi.
344 de Lubac, *Splendor of the Church*, 159.
as *peritas* at Vatican II, where he played a major role, and his elevation to Cardinal by John Paul II.

De Lubac provides an example of a theologian whose ecclesiology proved beneficial. He submitted himself to the judgment of his superiors, even when he was misunderstood or possibly misjudged. He kept the faith that the Divine was in the Church even when the human leaders were flawed. As a result of his submission to an ecclesiastical censure, he was able to maintain unity during a crisis, and finally emerge on the other side to see the benefit he brought to the larger Body through his labors.

The various currents of renewal evident in *Ressourcement* influenced Vatican II, and thereby the entire Catholic Church. *Ressourcement* theological method demonstrated recourse to biblical and patristic witness, followed by the subsequent history of doctrinal development. For these reasons, its methods have been termed “genetic,” as opposed to the “regressive” methods of manualist theology. As is evident in *Dei Verbum*, the call of the *Ressourcement* to return to the sources of Scripture and Church Fathers showed that theology was more than participating in officially sanctioned discourse about God. The thrust of scientific analysis of Church teaching or propositional statements in Scripture could not penetrate the depths of Christian theology. *Dei Verbum* reminded that theology probed the personal revealing of God, and it necessarily involved a personal

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response. This was in contradistinction from the emphasis of the manuals. The manuals emphasized the objective nature of revelation to such a degree that theology and apologetics were reduced to evidence that demanded a verdict. As Brian Daley reminded, “to say that we, as persons, are made in the image of God is to remind ourselves” that “our contact with God” “begins in mutual knowing.” This knowledge is something which “God must initiate, form, and complete,” and which “is meant to end in friendship.”

The Ressourcement also influenced the conclusions of Dei Verbum on the “hotly debated” topic of the sources of God’s revelation. By affirming that Christ was the single source of all of God’s revelation, the Scripture was placed within its broader historical relation to Church and Tradition; the Bible, for Catholics, could not be interpreted in a vacuum. On one hand, this reaffirmed the ancient conviction that the canonical texts were fully inspired of God. On the other hand, it confirmed another ancient conviction that the Scriptures needed to be read in their “unified sacred narrative.”

Dissimilar to restrictive methodical features in the manuals, Christian theology needed to observe the operation of the Spirit in the living history of the Church. Ressourcement theology helped form this emphasis in Vatican II.

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349 Cf. DV, 2, in Denzinger and Hünermann, Enchiridion Symbolorum, 4202:918: “Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself.”

350 Daley, Knowing God, 333.

351 Daley, Knowing God, 348.

352 Daley, Knowing God, 349–350. Cf. DV, 12, in Denzinger and Hünermann, Enchiridion Symbolorum, 4219:924: “Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written.”
Conclusion

In order to preserve the integrity of the Church’s faith in the face of “modernism,” Catholic leaders endorsed Scholasticism as a pre-modern method of philosophy and theology. However, fellow Catholics perceived the new application of Thomas to be ahistorical and rigid in its method, often resulting in unwarranted suspicion of those who endorsed other methods. The guide to determining orthodoxy had become narrow and was “responsible for rigidifying mainline Catholic theology.” According to Avery Dulles, one of the liabilities of this sort of approach to Church life was that it unwittingly encouraged people to be “overly concerned with fulfilling ecclesiastical obligations, and insufficiently attentive, at times, to fulfilling the law of charity.” It raised an obstacle to “creative and fruitful theology;” its rigidity diminished “critical and exploratory thinking.” Gabriel Daly argues that the Vatican’s severe response to modernism, especially near the time of Pascendi, did less to show the modernist that he was not Catholic, and more to demonstrate he was not Scholastic. A single “party in the Church had identified its tenets with those of universal Christianity.”

353 Daly, Transcendence and Immanence, 220.

354 Cf. Dulles, Models of the Church, 34–36. Avery Dulles lays out a helpful review of various ecclesiastical models, showing the benefits and liabilities of each model. Dulles considered the model used by Catholics in the late nineteenth century to be an example of an “institutional model” of Church governance. Among the benefits of the institutional model was that it insisted on continuity with Christian origins. In uncertain times, this provided firm connections to “an esteemed religious past.”

355 Dulles, Models of the Church, 36.

356 Daly, Transcendence and Immanence, 220.

357 Daly, Transcendence and Immanence, 221.
Alfred Loisy complained that the “theologians of His Holiness” had, without right, too quickly grouped him, Blondel, Laberthonnière, Tyrrell, Kant, and all of liberal Protestantism into a single system. The Vatican’s leaders had strategically “constructed a sort of encyclopedic doctrine with agnosticism as its foundation.”358 Several other scholars and priests who will not be surveyed here were disciplined by the Church during the crisis. Jesuit George Tyrrell was excommunicated a year prior to Loisy, although with a less severe punishment than Loisy’s vitandus.359 As with Blondel, Friedrich von Hügel was not excommunicated, but both lived under a cloud of suspicion as potentially undermining the Church’s teachings.360 Decades later, Henri de Lubac and some Ressourcement theologians experienced varying degrees of censure as well. It appears that Church discipline was not infrequently punitive, arguably reaching the level of abuse at times.

To this reader, some of the Vatican leadership’s determinations appear to have been justified. Select conclusions of Loisy, for example, clearly countered beliefs which were long-held convictions within Christianity. However, other perceived threats to the faith seem to have been exaggerated. Blondel, for example, was suspected of an unbridled philosophy of immanence although he was careful to affirm the value of

358 Loisy, My Duel with the Vatican, 307–308.

359 Ecclesiology was a key factor to be considered. Cf Reardon, Roman Catholic Modernism, 15, where he states that neither Tyrell nor Loisy drew upon Tübingen for their ecclesiology.

miracles and external evidences supporting Christian faith. Nonetheless, while certain problems associated with the Catholic Church’s handling of biblical modernity became obvious, something good emerged. It had been present at Tübingen decades earlier, and should not be neglected in the present day.

Most Catholics on all sides of the polemics believed that Christ was somehow present in the ordained leadership of the Church in a very real way, guiding its theological development. Despite the apparent narrow-mindedness and authoritarian behavior of some within the Catholic hierarchy, Catholic ecclesiology provided continuity which brought stability back into the Church over time. One of the contentions of this dissertation is that commentaries on the Catholic Modernist Crisis should not be negligent reporting the preserving and invigorating effect of Catholic ecclesiology. Often, scholarly works eruditely convey particular characters and their historic crises, as through a microscope, but insufficiently bring attention to the macroscopic image of vast processes extending throughout time. Although divergent concepts of the ideal ecclesiastical structure persisted among Catholics, most assumed some form of a sacramental view of the Church. Some distinct benefits of Catholic ecclesiology become evident when one surveys their struggles with biblical modernity.

Ecclesiology enabled Catholics to maintain a degree of unity during and after their crises. Certainly, some theological polemics tragically ended with real wounds for particular participants. However, in the end, disciplinary measures were effective.

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361 In the end, none of Blondel’s books were put on the Index.

Particular dogma, such as personal revelation, the knowledge of God, the historical validity of the Gospel accounts, the divine Person of Jesus, and the supernatural consciousness of Jesus, were safeguarded. An ideal role of ecclesiastical hierarchy is to provide parameters, such as the dogma just mentioned, in which theologians can safely function without jeopardizing unity. The purpose of hierarchy is not intended to control the minutiae of exploration. Ecclesiology is vital to transmitting, maintaining, and guaranteeing the central beliefs of Christianity. Sacramental Church teaching authority is more capable of proscribing error and securing unity than an anarchistic mob of brilliant theologians. Evangelicals lack such a universal mechanism for unity. Their denominations are often ideologically or geographically provincial. Some might have coalitions with other like-minded believers, but there is no comprehensive device to establish universal Christian unity on central theological claims.

Catholic ecclesiology provided their Church with tools to correct itself. The mistakes made by nineteenth-century Neo-Scholastics could be corrected in time by virtue of an ecclesiastical structure. At times, the Church’s hierarchy may have been wrong in how it administered discipline. However, the Church’s hierarchy was able to recognize its own disciplinary failures and attempt to prevent them from recurring. As George H. Tavard points out, hardly any in the Vatican’s 1893 inner circles would have imagined that, in less than a century, no fewer than three future popes and the Second

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363 From a Catholic perspective, infallibility does not presume to extend to discipline; it is confined to teaching on faith and morals applicable to the entire Church.

364 Cf., for example, John Paul II’s 1992 admittance that the manner in which the Inquisition handled the trial of Galileo was wrong.
Vatican Council would “recognize the merits of Maurice Blondel as a Christian and as a philosopher.”

Catholic ecclesiology also provided the individual exegete with wider resources for developing self-criticism. Patristic and medieval Scholastics have normative value for the Catholic theologian. Catholic ecclesiology forbids an exclusively private interpretation of the Bible; ideally, the text is read in an intergenerational community. Both Drey and Möhler amended some of their convictions, and expanded other ideas, after reading their own Tradition. When some theologians possibly became overly-friendly with Aufklärung sentiments or others nearly fell off the Romantic cliff into Pantheism, Catholic ecclesiology provided a self-critical mechanism for them. Even without the Magisterium, Loisy knew that he had departed from Catholicism.

Catholic ecclesiology provides the opportunity to creatively maintain orthodoxy by linking different generations in continuity. One example of this is the Church’s tolerance regarding the use of profane sciences in biblical exegesis. On one hand, Leo XIII’s 1893 encyclical stated that “a knowledge of natural science will be of very great assistance” to the “Professor of Sacred Scripture.” On the other hand, Pius X’s 1907 Pascendi cautioned against taking the Bible as merely a human book in light of the crisis surrounding Loisy’s historical criticism. Similarly, Benedict XV’s 1920 Spiritus

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365 George H. Tavard, “Blondel’s Action and the Problem of the University,” in Jodock, Catholicism Contending with Modernity, 168.

366 Leo XIII, Providentissimus Deus, 18.

367 Pius X, Pascendi, 22.
*Paraclitus* emphasized the “immunity of Scripture from error or deception.”\(^{368}\) “It is impious to even admit the very notion of error where the Bible is concerned.”\(^{369}\) Even de Lubac was concerned that some in his day remained hypnotized by the effects of an exclusively “critical method.”\(^{370}\) Yet, while maintaining the recommendations of Benedict XV,\(^{371}\) Pius XII, in his 1943 *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, clearly emphasized the need for honest historical critical studies. The biblical text needed to be studied as a human production; the philology of the text and the history behind it were vital to apprehending its full meaning. These distinct emphases do not contradict one another; instead, they give the exegete the opportunity to develop theology creatively within orthodox parameters. Further, as a result of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, a sense of liberty to study the literal text of the Bible burgeoned. However, Pius XII’s encyclical should not be interpreted as emancipation for Catholics to finally study the Bible as literature. Pius XII’s emphasis was distinct from his predecessors, but it was not opposed to them.\(^{372}\) Fitzmyer states that Pius XII’s “insistence on the literal sense did not commit Catholic interpreters to any fundamentalistic literalism, but it meant that the real religious meaning of the written Word of God had to be ascertained.”\(^{373}\) One generation’s needs differed from another generation’s. However, it was ecclesiology that linked the generations

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371 Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, 9.
372 Pius’ encyclical was written on the fiftieth anniversary of Leo XIII’s *Providentissimus Deus*.
together, and provided each generation’s theologians the opportunity to discover deeper understandings of orthodox dogma creatively.

Catholic ecclesiology is largely responsible for maintaining the sacramental dimension of biblical studies. Catholic hermeneutics is built upon the doctrine of Apostolic Succession. The hierarchy operates with confidence that God continuously ordains the Church’s leadership. Möhler was aware of corruptions in past leaders, but was still sure that it was the Spirit who had always designed the Church’s hierarchy. As late as 1943, Pius XII stated that the contemporary exegete will “find invaluable help” in the exegetical works of the “Holy Fathers, the Doctors of the Church and the renowned interpreters of past ages.” However, the help provided by these ancients is “by reason of the office assigned to them by God in the Church.” Pius acknowledged that “some” Fathers were “less instructed” “than the Scripture scholars of our time” because they simply did not have the benefit of historical critical methods of twentieth-century exegetes. Yet, it was their divinely-given “office,” not their scholarship, which “distinguished” them with a “certain subtle insight” into heavenly things, and the ability to “penetrate to the very innermost being of the divine word.” Pius recognized that divinely-given “office” within a broader ecclesiology of the authority of the Tradition, was vital to a profound reading of the Scriptures. This underlying confidence was an expansion of faith in Christ, who promised to be with the Church until the end of the age.

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375 Ibid.
Faith in the mystical presence of Christ in the Church correlated to a mystical understanding of the biblical text.

It is doubtful if Scripture studies can sustain a mystical element in evangelical theology without a reconsideration of ecclesiology. Certainly, evangelicals have always had a remnant, sometimes relatively large, who preserve the conviction that the Scriptures speak God’s words. However, without a universally authoritative teaching endorsement, it is questionable if evangelicals can prevent further fragmentation over how to read the Bible.

The Catholic Church’s engagement with biblical modernity raised critical questions, and not all of them were answered well. However, many answers were discovered already existing within the same Church. It is important to remember that the multiple fights within Catholicism at the turn of the twentieth century were under one roof. They lived in the same house in which Möhler, and many before him, dwelt. It’s critical to recognize the preserving effect ecclesiology can have on theology. Possibly, it is taken for granted and easy to miss for those inside the Catholic communion. However, even some who were cast out still recognized it. “With all of its accretions and perversions Catholicism is, for the Modernist, the only authentic Christianity. Whatever Jesus was, he was in no sense a Liberal Protestant.”

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376 George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), Preface, xx–xxi. This Preface was written two years after Tyrell’s excommunication.
CHAPTER FIVE
A CALL FOR EVANGELICAL POST-CRITICAL REASSESSMENT OF
ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Introduction

In light of the historical assessments of the previous chapters, this author calls upon fellow evangelicals to reexamine the role of ecclesiology, and the Catholic Church specifically, in biblical hermeneutics. The theological bane of evangelicalism is the widespread assumption that ecclesiology should play an insignificant role in the exegesis of Scripture. The range of evangelical treatment of Scripture remains very diverse. Yet, a common assumption operates in most paradigms. Very few evangelicals register the need for ecclesiology in exegetical labors. Fewer still acknowledge any pneumatic value in authoritative Catholic interpreters of Scripture. This prevalent neglect of ecclesiology and correlative antagonism towards the Catholic Church has affected exegesis by compromising the mystical quality of Christian faith at key moments of evangelical history, and has legitimized sectarianism; it is an enduring pathology that needs to be addressed.

Whether or not evangelicals reevaluate ecclesiology will bear future consequences. In addition to the pertinent topics Christians struggled with in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, new crises of faith will constantly appear. Many of these will affect discussions on human origins, the dignity of human life, human
sexuality, communication of the gospel across religious boundaries, and confession of dogmatic orthodoxy. If the trend of denying, or even undervaluing, the role of ecclesiology in the interpretation of the sacred text continues unabated, it will contribute to further demystification of sacred Scripture and fragmentation of Christian unity over such important issues. A universal interpretation of the biblical text on the deepest matters of Christian faith and morals will remain unattainable.

The remainder of this dissertation will call for a constructive, post-critical response to the dissimilar effects of ecclesiology on Catholic and evangelical exegesis of Scripture. Many evangelicals have read the writing on the wall, and multiple sincere efforts at renewing evangelicalism have recently occurred. However, most of these attempts do not strike deeply enough. They often critique evangelical handling of Scripture since the Enlightenment, but their critiques should go back to the Reformation for a thorough prescriptive resolution.¹ The long term abandonment of the Catholic Church and subsequent suspicion of nearly any ecclesiology must be reconsidered.

The term “post-critical” has various meanings to different people. This dissertation uses it as a way to retrieve positive meaning from an object which has been legitimately critiqued. While maintaining scrutiny of a particular object, it seeks to be self-critical, thus correcting harmful, exaggerated denunciations. It seeks progressive continuity; it neither wishes to reconstitute essentials nor return to a pristine beginning.

¹ As an example, in The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), A. T. B. McGowan distinguishes between different evangelical views of Scripture and their historic trajectories. However, in his proposal of an “older and better way” (123) to defend a high view of Scripture in the modern world, McGowan merely takes his readers back to Reformed theologians of recent centuries, such as Herman Bavinck. As a result, his work does not significantly engage the relationship between ecclesiology and hermeneutics.
Without discounting genuine differences between Catholic and Protestant theologies, this thesis warns against excessive dismissal, stemming from historic polemics, of the Catholic Church’s pneumatic participation\(^2\) in biblical exegesis. Such a sweeping, negative dismissal appears contrary to the Scriptures evangelicals claim to uphold, opens the door to a dismissal of nearly all ecclesiology, fosters a demystified understanding of a revelatory text, fails to prevent communal factions, and leads to shallow exegetical results. Unfortunately, such excesses are not uncommon in evangelical circles.

**Contours of Post-Critical Reassessment**

In its call for a theoretical shift in evangelical hermeneutics, this chapter pauses to provide illustration of what a positive post-critical assessment might look like. Over the last century, reappraisal within various branches of human knowledge chastened many disciplines by critiquing the assumed validity of dominant explanatory models. After critical research had advanced within distinct fields of study, many began to accept certain presumptions non-critically, resulting in closed-mindedness toward other beneficial methods of thought.

This section will briefly examine, merely as illustrations, specific arguments of two post-critical authors from distinct fields: chemist and philosopher of science Michael Polanyi (1891–1976) and philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005). Polanyi and Ricoeur are put forward to prepare for consideration later of analogs for evangelical exegetes. It is hoped that these analogs will help evangelicals discern possible contours of a post-critical understanding relative to ecclesiology and exegesis. It is necessary to give some time to

\(^2\) Ephesians 4:11–13.
these two authors’ works in order to adequately gain a glimpse of possible forms a constructive, post-critical assessment might exhibit. Polanyi and Ricoeur’s usefulness to this dissertation does not lie in their specific conclusions, whether philosophical, religious, scientific, or social. Neither will their epistemologies necessarily be offered as worthy of adoption today; they wrote decades ago when many other post-critical views were being developed, many of which operated within opposing epistemologies. Instead, Polanyi and Ricoeur are used in this work as illustrations of people who detected narrow modes of thinking which, although once developed around reasonable criticisms, now threatened legitimate advancement of their particular fields. They critiqued latent assumptions which they traced back to earlier thought. Polanyi and Ricoeur represent a larger constructive post-critical movement within Western thinking, and are helpful illustrations of what can positively occur as the result of paradigmatic shifts.

As mentioned, this dissertation seeks to address assumptions adopted in the first years of the Reformation. The claim here is that American evangelicalism has negligently operated under long-standing anti-ecclesiastical assumptions, and needs a more thorough self-critique. Polanyi and Ricoeur help provide the general shape for such an evaluation.

Michael Polanyi

Michael Polanyi’s effort at a post-critical philosophy of science is valuable to this dissertation because he is a recent example, in a field other than theology, of a call to critique assumed authoritative structures for interpreting data. Polanyi attempted to reevaluate the nature of knowing within his field of expertise, arriving at the goal of a fuller knowledge of the object under study and a beneficial social result. Polanyi is best known and revered by scientists today for his work as a chemist, being one of the
founders of the modern field of chemical dynamics. However, he also gained attention through his works on philosophical science, focusing on an “enquiry into the nature and justification of scientific knowledge.” In an analogous manner, this dissertation is calling for evangelicals to critique their own authoritative paradigms for biblical hermeneutics.

Polanyi diagnosed what he considered destructive consequences of dominant presumptions, and sought to reassess the reductive conception of knowing within his respective field. In his thinking, positivistic and exclusively inductive interpretations of real living objects tragically reduced those objects, leading to misinterpretations and even destructive conclusions “beyond the domain of science.” Polanyi argued that the modern “conception of knowing” amongst scientists needed modification because the unquestioned assumptions behind it created potentially harmful social and political fallout. Polanyi admitted that his “reconsideration of scientific knowledge” possibly bore few if any implications for the “exact sciences,” such as in his own field of chemistry. However, a “false idea” of science threatened a “destructive influence” over other fields directly associated with society, such as “biology, psychology, and sociology.”

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6 Ibid.

7 In addition to Nye, cf. Sam Addison, “Michael Polanyi,” n.p.; n.d. http://www.giffordlectures.org/lecturers/michael-polanyi. This is the written biography on Polanyi in the Gifford Lectures biographical page.


In addition, the very scientists who endorsed a severe rebuke of non-empirical methods of research were themselves inadequately self-critical. They were unaware that the active assumptions behind their methodologies often countered the actual process of several significant scientific discoveries in modern history. Polanyi sought to make room and mutual respect for varied methods of science; he did not seek to return to what some perceived to be a pre-modern scientific outlook.

**Polanyi’s Critique**

Atomic determinism, a philosophy Polanyi also called the “Laplacean fallacy” after the French mathematician Pierre-Simon Laplace, was dominant in the scientific community and regrettably became “a guide to human affairs.” Scientific investigation in a Laplacean world limited itself to matters that were measureable and discoverable through “strictly objective knowledge.” Subsequently, this philosophy influenced political action by leading to decisions solely based on externally observable factors, such as wealth. Politics, therefore, were considered to be necessarily shaped by force, motivated by greed and fear, with morality no longer seen as a guide but only a delusion. To Polanyi, the prevailing philosophy of deterministic science had contributed to the political idea that supreme good could be reduced to “material welfare.” If the trend continued, “all cultural activities” would be forced to “subserve the power of the State in transforming society for the achievement of welfare.” In such a development, the value of science would be reduced to its “utility for strengthening public power and

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10 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 141.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.
improving the standard of living.” In the end, according to Polanyi, such a philosophic movement within society, guided by “scientific severity,” would prevent potentially beneficial scientific exploration if a discovery was considered a threat to a purely material conception of human welfare. If science were dogmatically reduced to only analyzing external realities, it would suppress potentially legitimate discoveries and threaten “the position of science itself.” For Polanyi, therefore, the modern danger confronting scientific progress was no longer religious antagonism towards science. Rather, it was sourced “in the very acceptance” of a “reductive programme” of unquestioned ideas by practicing scientists.

According to Polanyi, the “delusion” of Laplace and others was the substitution of “knowledge of all experience for a knowledge of all atomic data.” In other words, an analysis of data was being equated with an analysis of life. Purely empirical studies may be helpful at analyzing rocks, but proved incapable at discerning the “increasingly complex function of higher animals.” “Facts about living things are more highly personal than the facts of the inanimate world.” As necessary as empirical research was, its tools were insufficient to comprehensively analyze higher animal, especially human, existence. A scientist who “ascends the evolutionary ladder” of beings must constantly

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14 Ibid.
15 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 141.
16 Ibid.
18 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 347.
19 Ibid.
employ new tools of research appropriate to the level of reality under investigation. Unfortunately, few admitted it, resulting in a merely materialistic understanding of humanity replete with dangerous social and political consequences.

Polanyi criticized the exclusive reliance on empirical evidence to interpret reality, resulting in a lack of “self-doubt” among his colleagues. Ever since the nineteenth-century positivism of Auguste Comte, bullish “belief in science stood supreme as the only belief that remained practically unchallenged;”

skepticism, such as Hume’s, was now discarded in light of “objective truth,” and intuition excluded as an unreliable medium. Polanyi perceived that the dominant scientific consensus was already moving within the “absurd”

philosophical trend of accentuating purely objective analyses of the world. Hard-core “empiricism, inductivism, and logical positivism”

continued unchecked, and caused a “mechanistic conception of the world” to emerge. This development disallowed scientists from going “beyond” strict empiricism to affirm anything that “cannot be tested by experience.”

Further, it separated science from the arts, religion, metaphysics, and ideology.

For Polanyi, objectivism had falsified a conception of truth by exalting what could be empirically proved while disparaging what could not be objectively proved.

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Such closed-mindedness was unscientific, inconsistent with the history of scientific discovery, and had blinded many in his generation to the need for self-criticism.\textsuperscript{26} It was incongruous with scientific history to think that doubt was the sole “solvent for error.”\textsuperscript{27} In fact, Polanyi decried the prevalent “doctrine of doubt” towards non-empirical claims as a detrimental “prejudice” commonly “taken for granted” among intellectuals, but which undermined true scientific progress. For Polanyi, groundless doubt was a “corollary of objectivism.” It assumed that all components of belief needed to be uprooted in order for facts to be “completely determined” by objective knowledge.\textsuperscript{28}

Opposing this assumption, Polanyi argued that the human mind had wider cognitive powers than an objectivist conception of knowledge allowed.\textsuperscript{29} “True innovations” in science, the kind “by which the whole framework of science is reformed,”\textsuperscript{30} often involved a type of belief. The power to believe was a “pre-eminent force of change in science” which led the genius of Columbus across the Atlantic, enabled Newton to cast his ideas into a “concrete and binding form,” and enabled mathematician Max von Laue to discover the diffraction of X-rays by crystals.\textsuperscript{31} Scientific faith had led to numerous discoveries in the areas of “heliocentric system, of genes, of quanta, of radioactivity or of relativity.”\textsuperscript{32}

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\textsuperscript{26} Polanyi, \textit{Personal Knowledge}, 238.
\textsuperscript{27} Polanyi, \textit{Personal Knowledge}, 279.
\textsuperscript{28} Polanyi, \textit{Personal Knowledge}, 269.
\textsuperscript{29} Polanyi, \textit{Personal Knowledge}, 249.
\textsuperscript{31} Polanyi, \textit{Personal Knowledge}, 277.
\textsuperscript{32} Polanyi, \textit{Personal Knowledge}, 276.
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In his writings, Polanyi expanded his focus beyond science to religion, and argued that scientific doubt had cast excessive suspicion upon religious claims. The closed-mindedness of the empiricists failed to supply a second, renewed meaning to the religious symbols they critiqued.33 Those who justified scientific doubt failed to understand the role of belief in their own academic discoveries. However, they enlarged their ignorance by discounting religious claims out of hand; they refused to consider the role that faith played in religious discoveries. A scientist cannot observe God any more than “truth or beauty can be observed;” God is not a “fact,” as a “thing” to be apprehended.34 Yet, faith in God provided opportunity to discover him anew. Polanyi reprimanded contemporary skepticism toward religious claims and stated that “an era of great religious discoveries may lie before us.”35

Polanyi identified the root of the “massive modern absurdity” of restricting scientific theory to observable facts as an unnecessary separation between objective and subjective aspects of knowing; it was a fundamental separation between mathematical knowledge and empirical knowledge.36 Theoretical or mathematical knowledge, as distinct from experimental analysis, had always been needed in science to guide the interpretation of empirical data. The two were distinct but could not be separated. “Into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is

33 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 286.
34 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 279.
being known, and that this coefficient is no mere imperfection but a vital component of his knowledge.”

**Personal Knowledge**

In order to critique the exclusive reliance on empirical knowledge in modern science, Polanyi sought to re-open inquiry into the performance of human knowing. He concluded that humans function with two distinct but related types of knowledge, and that modern scientific endeavors neglected one of those aspects. The first type of knowledge was explicit, articulated, and formal. This type of knowledge was gained by propositional instruction. It was bound by rules of empiricism, was partial in its focus, codified and able to be written down, and linked to objectivity. Polanyi dubbed the second type of human knowledge as tacit. For Polanyi, tacit knowledge was neither formalized nor articulated; rather, it was implicit awareness of a whole. It was intuitive and passionate, learned in the structure of a master-apprentice relationship, and was linked to subjectivity. Polanyi admitted to using “the findings of Gestalt psychology” to develop his argument. “Sensations are not simply raw experiences, but the interaction

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40 The definition of tacit knowledge varies among different authors, with some contradictions among authors regarding its precise definition. Hedesstrom and Whitley lay out some of the distinct understandings in “What Is Meant by Tacit Knowledge? Towards a Better Understanding of the Shape of Actions.”

41 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, preface, vii. Gestalt psychology holds that the whole is greater than the parts; the human mind considers a complete object prior to analyzing its portions.
of experience with a pre-formed cognitive structure.” Experience therefore requires an *a priori* structure in order to be properly interpreted.⁴² To Polanyi, no sharp distinction existed between explicit and tacit knowledge. Therefore, modern science had crippled its own capabilities for genuine progress by its self-imposed limitations. Polanyi put forward the idea of Personal Knowledge to describe the unity of objective and subjective aspects of knowing, particularly relative to science.⁴³ “It seems reasonable to describe this fusion of the personal and the objective as Personal Knowledge.”⁴⁴ He claimed that all scientific knowledge involved subjective scrutiny united to empirical analyses.

For Polanyi, complete knowledge of an object necessarily involved both explicit and tacit knowledge. However, he argued that the first type of knowledge could not exist without the second. Just as one could not understand particulars without first referencing their whole, tacit knowledge provided the basis for explicit knowledge. Polanyi used multiple everyday illustrations to make this point. Prior to a biologist dissecting an animal’s parts, he must first appreciate it as an animal;⁴⁵ he must assume the organic relations of the many body parts prior to being able to explain them. One learns to ride a bicycle by observing others, and not by reading propositional statements in an instruction manual on how to keep one’s balance or the complex muscular activity required. “Rules of art can be useful, but they do not determine the practice of art.” Rules can guide only if

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they are integrated with “practical knowledge.” They are integrated with “practical knowledge.”

“Even a geographical map fully embodies in itself a set of strict rules for finding one’s way through a region of otherwise unchartered experience.” Polanyi cited Copernicus as an example of a scientist who ventured beyond his experience of the “sun, the moon, the stars rising daily in the east to travel across the sky towards their setting in the west” to transform human knowledge of the universe. Copernicus utilized “abstract theory” of an “imaginary solar standpoint” to help revolutionize the Ptolemaic “picture of the solar system.” Conversely, “by concentrating attention on his fingers, a pianist can temporarily paralyze his movement.” To Polanyi’s mind, modern science suffered from a self-imposed paralysis, and had lost its artistic rhythm. Although this narrowness of thought had little bearing on the analysis of “crystals,” such materialistic assumptions could prove deadly as one moved to an analysis of “sentience,” “intelligence,” and “emotional relations” of persons.

Critique of Polanyi

Reactions to Polanyi’s conclusions are varied. Thomas Kuhn, for example, is well known for his description of Polanyi’s “brilliantly developed” theme of tacit knowledge. Many scientists resonated with Polanyi’s critique of dominant narrow-

46 Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, 50.
47 Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, 4.
48 Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, 3–5.
49 Polanyi, The Tacit Dimension, 18.
50 Polanyi, The Tacit Dimension, 51.
mindedness in scientific circles, and some were favorable towards the religious tone of his works. Others, notably Austrian Karl Popper, found Polanyi’s works “unpersuasive,” even “contemptuous.” Philosopers, particularly, were not impressed with Polanyi’s arguments for Personal Knowledge. Due to the fact that Polanyi had no master-apprentice relationship in sociology or philosophy, he was often regarded as an outsider in those fields, except when he brought his scientific expertise to bear on a question. Polanyi continues to draw interest, notably among some religious thinkers, including philosopher Charles Taylor.

Paul Ricoeur

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur is valuable to this dissertation because he provides another modern example, in a field other than theology, of post-critical analysis. Ricoeur acknowledged the benefit of a hermeneutics of suspicion towards ancient symbols. However, he deemed suspicion to be insufficient for full analysis of an object, and cautioned against its unbridled excesses. He argued for the need to go beyond criticism and reconsider the original symbol. Ricoeur noticed the modern tendency to dismiss symbols entirely during critique, and he called for critical empathy towards the scrutinized symbols in order to better comprehend them. In an analogous manner, this

52 Nye, Michael Polanyi and His Generation, 260.
53 Ibid.
54 Nye, Michael Polanyi and His Generation, 304.
55 Cf. the ongoing Polanyi Society, http://www.polanyisociety.org/. Also, cf. Martin X. Moleski, Personal Catholicism: The Theological Epistemologies of John Henry Newman and Michael Polanyi (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000). Moleski argues that John Henry Newman’s argument that scientific standards for evidence were too restrictive used different language than Polanyi, but struck a similar chord. For Newman, the mind guided itself into reasoning through its illative sense while Polanyi spoke of the role of tacit knowledge. Moleski argues that Catholic teaching rests on personal knowledge.
dissertation is calling for critical empathy for the Catholic Church from an evangelical perspective.

**Critique of False Consciousness**

Ricoeur examined the “aftermath” of the hermeneutics of suspicion, and sought to critique its excesses. He analyzed three critical thinkers, whom he called the three “masters of suspicion:” Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. The effect of their works had brought Western culture to an “irreversible” point which demanded conversation. Ricoeur used the phrase *false consciousness*, an expression actually employed by Marx, to identify a common link between the three men. Each author identified distinct fabricated appearances in society related to his particular field of study, and attempted to dismantle those false exteriors. For Ricoeur, none of these authors was exclusively negative. Each affirmed a positive end of negating false appearances in the human consciousness.

For Ricoeur, Marx exposed what he considered the illusion of the economic world as a reflection of class struggle. Marx’s “method of destruction” was valuable for religion because it exposed the “economic motivation” behind some religious expressions; it discerned the relationship between ideology and the phenomena of domination. Marx capably showed how theological ideology had authorized domination by religious

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59 Ibid.

authorities and the forced submission of the faithful. Demystification of religion, according to Marx, would liberate humanity to focus on the “biology of reproduction and an economy of production.” It would enable humanity to become transparent; humanity’s speech would be equal to its actions, and its actions equal to its being.\(^{61}\) For Ricoeur, Nietzsche unmasked human achievement as a will to power. He contributed a “great deciphering” of the strong and weak human will “behind the masked signs” of intentions.\(^{62}\) Nietzsche’s nihilistic conclusion regarding God’s death nonetheless allowed for humanity to be reborn, and focus on the “after-man, the superman.”\(^{63}\) For Ricoeur, Freud uncovered various hidden neurotic and psychiatric motivations behind human actions.\(^{64}\) He searched out the “genealogy of desire” which generated culture, and he exercised his critique through psychiatry.\(^{65}\) If humanity would expose the myth of its own consciousness as rooted in “infantile desire,” Freud saw the possibility of passing “from the pleasure principle to the reality principle.”\(^{66}\) According to Ricoeur, these three masters affirmed a shared type of eschatology; their iconoclastic critique allowed for modern humanity to enter the future by facing reality without the religious masks of fear, domination, and hate.\(^{67}\)


Ricoeur saw similarities among the authors. A “negative form of
demystification,” an exercise of suspicion, a “totally new and different” form of doubt
was emerging throughout society and was evident in each author. However, unlike
Descartes’ doubt, which leaned on the “fortress of consciousness,” these authors doubted
the reliability of consciousness itself. Descartes was doubtful of things, but not suspicious
of his own cognizance.\footnote{Ricoeur, “The Critique of Religion,” in \textit{The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur}, 214–215.} For Ricoeur, any type of religious faith in the modern world
needed to “pass through” “so great and respectable a critique.”\footnote{Ricoeur, “The Critique of Religion,” in \textit{The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur}, 219.} However, modern
religious faith also needed to extend beyond the critique.

**Advancing Beyond Critique**

While Ricoeur acknowledged the value of the prevalent hermeneutics of
suspicion, he critiqued it as insufficient.\footnote{Ibid.} Religious symbols, while being rightly
critiqued, still offered significance for the modern world. Ancient myths and symbols
belonging to the infancy of mankind,” the beginning of meanings “contained in
language.”\footnote{Paul Ricoeur, \textit{Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation}, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 28.} For example, old myths of guilt, chaos, blinding, or Fall gave rise to literary
symbols of wandering, captivity, and deviation. Although these denoted original human
self-understanding, and referred back to hierophanies, they also could benefit modern
humanity by helping “anticipate our spiritual” future. Symbols allowed humanity to develop a healthy future in continuity with its primordial awareness; they reproduced humanity’s situation in the world. After repeating our “childhood in all our senses,” they could help “explore our adult life;” they gave rise to new “thought.”

For Ricoeur, modern epistemologies were biased and did not permit religious symbols to provide meaning. Intellectual prejudice prevented modern humanity from gaining “self-knowledge through the long route of the interpretations of texts, monuments, and cultural forms.” Although demystification identified false consciousness of externals, it did not provide a necessary “internal critique” of the content of religious proclamation; it neglected the restorative possibilities in the very symbols which were critiqued. For example, Freud’s narrow, restricted interpretation of the meaning of religious symbols had “permanently fixed meaning,” which prevented “deciphering” of fresh meaning. Reductionism had closed more paths than it opened.

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76 Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 347.
77 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 498.
80 Bultmann was one positive example to Ricoeur of attempts to analyze the internal content of the Christian kerygma, not just its external forms. Cf. Ricoeur, “The Critique of Religion,” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 219.
81 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 499.
As a result, “we can never encounter anything” in symbols but “residues.”

The three “masters” opposed a phenomenology of the sacred, and “any hermeneutics understood as the recollection of meaning” and “the reminiscence of being.” Their explanation of reality “reduces by explaining through causes,” whether psychological, political, economic, or others. Ricoeur appreciated “contemporary criticism” for its “desire and endeavor for objectivity.” However, the positivistic idea of “historical objectivity” was an “incomplete objectivity.”

Ricoeur called for a restoration of “signifying language, a language of being and existence,” in order to provide a relevant cultural expression of Christianity in the age of suspicion. A post-critical effort was needed to go beyond the “school of suspicion;” “great syntheses” between objective facts and subjective humanity needed to occur.

Positivism, for Ricoeur, could not transcend the level of a document; it could only critique the externals of its literary object. While the critic of ancient symbols certainly began with facts, he needed to be wary of a “fetishism of facts.” Subjective factors influenced objective research, which meant the “historian’s subjectivity” should be

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83 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 503.
84 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 35.
89 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 32.
91 Ibid.
studied as well as the events of history. The masters of suspicion tragically excluded such subjectivity and merely focused on externals; humanity within history had been lost. Their work “omits man,” and yields to the “fascination of a false objectivity.” In their surveys of history, there were no longer “men and human values, but only structures, forces, and institutions” existed. Just as no physics exists without physicists, so any complete historical analysis of religious symbols needs to include analyses of human consciousness. The task of hermeneutics needed to attend to the “structure of existence” surrounding a person. In what Ricoeur called a “philosophic anthropology,” comprehension of a sacred text involved a “step toward the primitive, the primordial, the original.” Understanding involved a “precomprehension,” including how one understood himself and his world. Ricoeur considered such a philosophical critique of human existence as “prediscourse.” It did not critique the methods or results of science; scientific knowledge had its own proper mode of knowing and interpretation. Rather, it was a philosophical critique of how scientific knowledge takes place within the comprehension of one’s existence in the world. As a result, a “kind of circularity” was needed between understanding the text and understanding oneself. Ricoeur acknowledged that the idea of a hermeneutical circle was a “sheer scandal” to those taught in the “Tradition” of logical empiricism. However, he concluded that such a circle was

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95 Ricoeur, “Metaphor and the Main problem of Hermeneutics,” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 144.
necessary for interpretation of humanly-generated symbols. 97 “The object of history is the human subject himself.” 98 Therefore, intellectual sympathy was needed.

Sympathy

In addition to his critical stance, Ricoeur’s survey of symbols adopted a suspended faith, dubbed “sympathy,” 99 toward the object under study. His goal was to allow the symbol to speak again. For Ricoeur, sympathy denoted a positive “recollection of meaning” 100 after necessary critique and suspicion, 101 which helped attain an “integral comprehension” 102 of symbols. Sympathy helped transport the critic “into another universe of meaning;” 103 it provided him with “affinity” which made him contemporaneous with the symbol. 104 In order to accomplish such sympathy, the historian needed to temporarily withdraw from his “customary environment” and project himself “hypothetically into another present.” 105 He accepted the “suspended and neutralized adoption of the beliefs of past men” in order to understand them. He called up their “values” in order to relive what they lived. He became “vitally interested” in their ideals,

97 Ricoeur, “Metaphor,” in The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, 145.
98 Ricoeur, History and Truth, 40.
99 Ricoeur, History and Truth, 28.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
103 Ricoeur, History and Truth, 28.
104 Ibid.
105 Ricoeur, History and Truth, 28.
and granted their faith “hypothetically.”¹⁰⁶ Ricoeur sought to establish a link between uncultivated belief and educated sympathy. “The second naïveté aims to be the post-critical equivalent of the pre-critical hierophany.”¹⁰⁷

“Sympathy” had been at the beginning of the work of the critic as a first naïveté; as yet “uncultivated,” it initiated the work of research. After the initial engagement, reasoned analysis provided a “methodical step”¹⁰⁸ of necessary critique. Now, sympathy needed to return at the end of the intellectual work of the critic, as a second naïveté of “educated” understanding. Unfortunately, the schools of suspicion neglected this third step, and would not allow themselves to advance beyond their reasoned analyses to achieve renewed meaning. Ricoeur’s idea of “postcritical faith” sought the “restoration of meaning,”¹⁰⁹ not its destruction. It was rational because it critically interpreted; it did not merely accept what was presented to it. Yet, it was a sort of faith in that it sought, through its interpretation, a new encounter with the ancient symbol. Ricoeur understood his combination of understanding and faith to be a sort of hermeneutical circle,¹¹⁰ which was “the contrary of suspicion.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Ricoeur, History and Truth, 29.

¹⁰⁷ Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, 352.


¹⁰⁹ Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy, 28.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.
Ricoeur did not call for a return to pristine origins. A cultural distance, a “problem of contemporaneity,”112 existed between the original texts and the contemporary world. Certainly, hermeneutics needed to keep a critical distance, and remain true to its own standards of what was “physical, historical, true, false, believable, and unbelievable.”113 The “immediacy of belief” had been “irremediably lost” through modern criticism,114 which prevented a return to a “primitive naïveté.”115 However, in its suspicious analysis of outdated language, hermeneutics could not forget the original questions posed by ancient texts. Ricoeur was also careful to say that this “sympathetic effort”116 was “not merely an imaginative effort,” but was a “real projection into another human life.”117 Ricoeur’s historian, through his imagination, acknowledged that he was “part of the same humanity” as the objects of his study.118 The aim was “restoring historical distance” between the past event and the modern day, and to “achieve the absolute reality of past human experience.”119 The epoch in which the symbol was created needed to be viewed from an interior vantage point, by a “kind of imagination, a temporal imagination.”120 True progress in human thought involved going beyond the facts and putting “feeling and

114 Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, 351.
115 Ibid.
117 Ricoeur, History and Truth, 28.
118 Ricoeur, History and Truth, 29.
119 Ricoeur, History and Truth, 28.
120 Ibid.
imagination” back into rationality.\textsuperscript{121} History needed to become “animated by a will for encounter as much as by a will for explanation.”\textsuperscript{122} Among additional caveats, Ricoeur cautioned against merely projecting one’s subjectivity, replete with one’s own “beliefs and prejudices,” onto the texts being read. The “meaning of the text” could not be subjected to the power of the interpreting subject. Instead, the reader of a text must allow “the work and the world” of the text to “enlarge” his own horizons of self-understanding.\textsuperscript{123}

Ricoeur applied his philosophical views to religious belief, specifically, as they related to Christianity. He attempted to make room for religious belief in a modern critical world by creating a “conjunction of belief and criticism.”\textsuperscript{124} He thought that in order to have a “better understanding” of humanity, as well as humanity’s “bond” to the “being of all beings,” symbolic thought needed to be employed. He sought to get beyond the impasse of belief and criticism by a third way, a second naïveté. He made a “wager” of “betting on the significance of the symbolic world.”\textsuperscript{125} A field of philosophical opportunities could be provided by a sort of “deduction” of religious symbols, a “means of detecting and deciphering human reality.”\textsuperscript{126} For Ricoeur, the modern exegete needed to return to the sacred text at the conclusion of his criticism. He must be “both a believer

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ricoeur, \textit{History and Truth}, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Ricoeur, \textit{History and Truth}, 29.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Ricoeur, “Metaphor,” in \textit{The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur}, 145.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Ricoeur, \textit{The Symbolism of Evil}, 352.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Ricoeur, \textit{The Symbolism of Evil}, 354–355.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Ricoeur, \textit{The Symbolism of Evil}, 355.
\end{itemize}
and an atheist;”¹²⁷ he must both “surrender” before the text, and “question” it.¹²⁸ The Christian exegete is therefore “not his own master.” He must, as a sort of expression of faith, place himself under the “Announcement” of the text. He must allow it to speak to him on its own terms; he must allow the text to “seize” him. This approach will allow him to distinguish between the “false and true scandal in the heart of the text.”¹²⁹ Although a particular cultural milieu in which a Scripture was written might be exposed, and the false consciousness regarding its temporal situation smashed, the exegete must still “place himself under” the text in order for it to speak to him again. It is only in this integration of criticism and belief, a hermeneutical circle of “reinterpretation,” that the modern person can genuinely believe the Christian kerygma.¹³⁰

For Ricoeur, each generation should address its concerns with both critical assessment of and a listening ear to ancient symbols. One could not allow himself to be “caught” in the “cultural trap” of the text of the Bible.¹³¹ The cultural terms originally used to convey the Christian Gospel, whether rooted in Hellenism or Orientalism, needed to be identified and rejected by the modern era. However, the cultural vehicle, not the symbol itself, needed to be demolished; the symbols were still speaking, and to throw them away meant to discard the opportunity to understand modern humanity. By allowing the religious symbols of Christianity to communicate again, new possibilities of

¹³⁰ Ibid.
¹³¹ Ibid.
understanding were opened. “To demythologize is to dissolve the false scandal in order to have the true scandal, the original scandal, revealed to all.”\textsuperscript{132} The death of the old allowed for the birth of the new. Ricoeur briefly referred to the first chapters of Genesis as an illustration of the importance of this sort of pre-scientific reflection. Ricoeur acknowledged that the account of Creation in Genesis could not be squared with modern scientific understanding of the universe. Nonetheless, it could not be dismissed simply because it was pre-scientific. It was valuable because it belonged to the domain of human pre-understanding;\textsuperscript{133} it provided the “primordial tissue” of humanity’s first questions of “meaning, of being created, lost, and saved.”\textsuperscript{134} Its “progressive portrayal” of humanity could help modern man understand his own existence, whether in relation to the cosmos, or in interpreting evil. Modern science provided a scientific explanation, but Genesis provided the original theatre of human existence.\textsuperscript{135} In his return to symbols, the modern exegete was equipped with both a demystified critique of the text and an awareness of the need to ask of the text the basic questions of human existence.

\textbf{Criticism of Ricoeur}

Certainly, some religious observers criticize Ricoeur’s method. Richard Topping, for example, while appreciating Ricoeur’s work, argues that Ricoeur’s method is not subjected to the gospel. He accuses Ricoeur of submitting the integrity of the Christian

\textsuperscript{132} Ricoeur, “The Critique of Religion,” in \textit{The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur}, 221.

\textsuperscript{133} Ricoeur, “Language of Faith,” in \textit{The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur}, 229.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{135} Ricoeur, “Language of Faith,” in \textit{The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur}, 228.
interpretive practice to suspicion “in a rudderless correlation” of the two. In the end, Topping argues, the text of Scripture is judged by a norm of suspicion that outranks the living Church.¹³⁶ For Topping, Ricoeur fails to make a convincing case that the prevalent suspicion merits such compliance. Michael Pahls, also while noting appreciation for Ricoeur’s work, comments that the philosopher leads his readers to engage the text, but fails to lead them to engage the person of Christ behind the text. A personal encounter with Christ is lacking, according to Pahls.¹³⁷ From the perspective of this dissertation, it would be potentially reckless to categorize thinkers within first and second naïveté groupings merely because they lived before or after the Enlightenment. As this dissertation’s first chapter demonstrated, multiple authors critically approached the Scriptures in medieval and ancient times. People have simultaneously read the Scriptures both critically and from a faith perspective since the beginning of Christianity.

**Observable Contours of Post-Critical Analyses**

Evangelical theologians can benefit from analogs of Polanyi’s and Ricoeur’s post-critical methods. The value of highlighting Polanyi and Ricoeur was to demonstrate the broader possibilities of post-critical thought in the modern age without championing their particular views. For both men, criticism needed to be restorative, not reductive. As Ricoeur articulated, an interpretation of ancient religious objects needed to respect the

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original symbol or enigma.\textsuperscript{138} While criticism and rationality could rightfully demystify and demythologize, it could excessively reduce or destroy if left unchecked. The analysis of Polanyi and Ricoeur provides three contours with which a post-critical evangelical hermeneutic needs to be formed.

A survey of Polanyi and Ricoeur helps provide direction for evangelicals who wish to progress beyond unnecessary degrees of anti-Catholic rhetoric, and seriously desire to engage the theological relationship between ecclesiology and exegesis, Church and Bible. Following are three contours evident in Polanyi’s and Ricoeur’s works which, analogously, can prove valuable for evangelicals.

\textbf{Self Criticism}

One observable contour within Polanyi’s and Ricoeur’s post-critical work is self-criticism. In their respective fields, they attempted to critique established structures of thought for interpreting data. Both were suspicious of exclusively extrinsic and positivistic claims of knowing, which they considered dominant during their generation. While appreciating advances gained through recent critical developments, they noticed many in their fields were blind to the limitations of the leading epistemological models. As a result, Polanyi and Ricoeur argued, many in their fields lacked the vision to move the respective bodies of knowledge forward. Further, each author expressed concern over potential ramifications, social and otherwise, resulting from such short-sightedness.

\textsuperscript{138} Ricoeur, \textit{The Symbolism of Evil}, 349–350.
Openness To New Ways Of Knowing

Another observable contour within Polanyi’s and Ricoeur’s work is openness to new ways of knowing. Polanyi and Ricoeur each sought to expand epistemology within their respective fields. While affirming the importance of leading methods of analysis, they identified limits to those techniques. In addition, they criticized the apparent lack of openness to new methods of knowing among their colleagues.

Polanyi critiqued exclusively empirical analytical methods when applied to complex living systems. He disparaged a dismissal of knowledge gained through living experience for knowledge of atomic data which was interpreted in a philosophy of determinism. This was because it resulted in incomplete understanding of life, especially humanity. At times, it resulted in grave social consequences. Polanyi put forward “personal knowledge” as a corrective. Personal knowledge included both empirical analysis and examination of tacit knowledge. In Polanyi’s mind, modern science, despite its great achievements, had crippled its ability to move forward through neglecting the foundational role of tacit knowledge. Genuine progress in science would require a unity of objective and subjective awareness.

On one hand, Ricoeur applauded the modern benefit of a critique of false consciousness in the appropriation of religious and social symbols, a standard established by Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. It proved helpful at unmasking hidden motivations behind the common use of ancient symbols. On the other hand, Ricoeur argued that the identification of false consciousness was insufficient in itself. In spite of his recognition of benefit in such critique, Ricoeur asserted that it was excessively extrinsic. Modern critics of ancient symbols needed to go further than they were willing and attempt to
understand the profound relation between the symbol and human consciousness. Ricoeur called for reassessment of previously dismissed symbols in order to rediscover their value for the modern world. The modern critic needed to get beyond his extrinsic criticism and seek to restore meaning to what he previously critiqued. In order to accomplish a beneficial “second naïveté,” the critic needed to sympathetically approach the symbol.

**Continuity**

A third observable contour within Polanyi’s and Ricoeur’s post-critical efforts is continuity. For Polanyi, “superior knowledge” within scientific communities was marked by mutual respect and acceptance of scientists with diverse methods.139 This respect needed to traverse generations.140 Superior knowledge included regard for one’s “intellectual ancestry;” esteem was due for the total of what a culture’s classics had uttered and its great people had done.141 Lack of regard for continuity in the scientific community demonstrated a misunderstanding of the nature of scientific knowledge and resulted in the loss of credible models of understanding. While rejecting pre-critical mythical interpretations of the physical world, Polanyi’s scientist nonetheless needed to

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139 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 374–375.

140 Polanyi’s emphasis on continuity does not imply an unwillingness to toss away incorrect paradigms for new, more accurate models. Paradigm shifts (a term Thomas Kuhn popularized) are part of scientific discovery. As a scientist, Polanyi wasn’t tied to the past. However, here he is resisting unwarranted removal of credit-worthy “tacit” ways of knowing by strict determinists.

141 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 375–376. In this author’s view, Braaten advocates a negative, and unnecessary, path of paradigmatic shift in ecclesiology. Citing Kuhn, Braaten suggests that necessary paradigmatic shifts “comes about over a lot of dead bodies.” Unlike Polanyi, Braaten sees the need for modern ecclesiology to sever its connections with “old” paradigms of “hierarchical relations. Braaten, *Mother Church*, 70–71, 83. To this author, Braaten misses a golden opportunity to express the possibility of continuity in Christian paradigmatic shifts.
remember the pre-scientific basis of all science. Plants, for example, were not discovered initially by a botanist,\textsuperscript{142} nor were stars viewed first by an astronomer.

Ricoeur’s attempt to advance beyond critique of false consciousness included a return to ancient symbols. For Ricoeur, the ancient naïveté should not be restored, but the same symbols ought to be revisited. Symbols could be positively utilized to communicate a recollection of meaning to the contemporary world. However, severe critique had muted them, and confined them with permanent, fixed meaning. For Ricoeur, a phenomenology of the sacred required a degree of continuity.

\textbf{Summary}

A review of Polanyi and Ricoeur helps provide possible contours for a post-critical reassessment of evangelical exegesis. Positive and beneficial attempts have been made recently by evangelicals to renew their movement. Some of these are listed below. However, without consciously shaping their efforts within the contours of self-criticism, openness to new ways of knowing, which are not really new, and continuity, the long-term effectiveness of these efforts is questionable. As Ricoeur said in a different context, the positive goal must be to “return to the sacred text at the conclusion” of “criticism.”\textsuperscript{143}

\textbf{Renewing Evangelicalism}

Various attempts have recently been made by evangelicals to refurbish their hermeneutics, and move past some of the historical problems with the movement’s exegesis of Scripture. Some efforts exhibit budding ecclesiologies, and are moving in

\textsuperscript{142} Polanyi, \textit{Personal Knowledge}, 139.

\textsuperscript{143} Ricoeur, “The Critique of Religion,” in \textit{The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur}, 222.
directions similar to this dissertation.\textsuperscript{144} Other attempts appear to prolong the neglect of ecclesiology, and move in the direction of repristination, or maintenance of what was considered originally correct in Protestantism. Others don’t seem to care.

Following are select illustrations of attempts by evangelicals to improve the quality of biblical interpretation in the modern world. The categorization of Biblical Literalism, Protestant \textit{Ressourcement}, and Communal Hermeneutic is intended to provide basic reference points; they are not neat, mutually exclusive descriptors. Legitimate argument can be made to increase the number of categories, or create hybrid markers. Further, certain of the authors represented are prolific; some of their views have naturally progressed over time. It is not the intention of this work to pigeon-hole any author into an inescapable mold. The purpose of presenting a review of these various works is to demonstrate active, broad movements within evangelical theology.

**Biblical Literalism**

A large number of evangelicals have sought to bring renewal, or at least maintain stability, by restating the importance of the literal text of Scripture. However, their emphasis on the text as they read it has prevented them from critiquing themselves very deeply. Most evangelicals\textsuperscript{145} consider the literal text of Scripture as divinely inspired. However, Biblicists emphasize inspiration of the literal text to such a degree that the

\textsuperscript{144} Cf. Charles W. Colson and Richard John. Neuhaus, \textit{Your Word Is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together} (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002). The direction of Evangelicals and Catholics Together was a start at serious dialogue, but much more needs to be accomplished for Christ’s prayer (John 17:20–21) to be realized. Only few evangelical works seriously analyze Catholic thought, rather than talk past it.

\textsuperscript{145} Including this author.
necessary ecclesial environment of the text is forgotten. In addition, Biblicists often
limit revelation to extrinsic propositions.

**Fundamentalism**

Fundamentalism, as an American phenomenon, increasingly grew beyond the Presbyterian split, appealing to those in all denominations who desired to hold onto the traditional faith in the face of modernity. The movement became increasingly sectarian after the battles over the Bible during the 1920s, and has consistently placed the inerrancy of the biblical text as the first affirmation in their lists of doctrinal confessions. Some fundamentalists essentially went underground for decades, removed themselves from fellowship with other Christian communities, and shielded themselves from “general changes in American life.” One of the perennial features of fundamentalism was a common “anti-intellectualism.” One author likened the legacy of the movement to severe treatment for a cancer patient. Fundamentalists selected a harsh remedy for what

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146 There are many forms of literalism which will not be distinguished at length in this work. The object at this point is to identify the hermeneutical focus which is primarily, sometimes exclusively, on the text of Scripture as it plainly reads. Briefly, some literalists employ more ecclesiology or Tradition than others, and some differ on the meaning and extent of inspiration of the sacred text. For example, cf. Geisler’s presentation and critique of multiple evangelical scholars who hold distinct views of inspiration and inerrancy. In the book, Geisler devotes eight entire chapters to critiquing other evangelical views than his own. Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

147 Fundamentalists are viewed together with evangelicals in this work due to their common historical roots, and their current appreciation for the plain text of Scripture. It is understood that the two broad movements are currently distinct from each other at several key points and can justifiably be placed in separate categories in other studies. Fundamentalists generally do not view themselves as evangelicals. Evangelical Donald A Carson considers Fundamentalists as evangelicals, despite their separatist habits, due to their allegiance to the “evangel.” Donald A. Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church.” in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1990), 352.

148 Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 221.

they considered the drastic disease of modernism. They survived the treatment, but were “horribly disfigured” by the cure.\textsuperscript{150}

After the embarrassing Scopes Trial and the breakup of Princeton Seminary, fundamentalism faded from “reputed centers of American life.”\textsuperscript{151} The movement’s attention turned away from denominational boards or schools of higher learning, and focused on the development of local pastors and independent congregations. Very many ministry organizations were formed, including radio stations, mission agencies, and Bible colleges; seminaries such as Dallas Theological Seminary\textsuperscript{152} and Bob Jones University, were formed during this time. The movement increased its numbers among “ordinary people” and took three basic forms. First, some individual fundamentalists remained in larger mixed denominations that likewise welcomed more liberal thinkers. Second, fundamentalist tendencies grew rapidly in non-traditional Christian societies, such as Pentecostal and Holiness movements. Third, the more extreme fundamentalists separated and created independent denominations.\textsuperscript{153} Since the 1960s, only the latter of the three forms of the movement continued to wear the badge “Fundamentalist.”\textsuperscript{154} Today, this third group is still marked by their separatist tendencies.\textsuperscript{155} The other two groupings have

\textsuperscript{150} Noll, Scandal, 145.

\textsuperscript{151} Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 193.

\textsuperscript{152} The mention of Dallas or other schools is historical. It is not necessarily suggesting that those schools have fully remained in their original molds.

\textsuperscript{153} Including Chicago’s own Independent Fundamentalist Churches of America (IFCA), founded following the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. The group consists of roughly 1,000 congregations in America and nearly 3,000 additional congregations in 26 other countries. Cf. their website at http://www.ifca.org/.

\textsuperscript{154} Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 194–195.

\textsuperscript{155} Cf., for example, the ninth affirmation of the IFCA’s Articles of Biblical Faith is simply entitled “Separation.” In 2:B of their Statement of Faith, they warn against any “effort to promote the Gospel by
consistently attempted to reenter society in a more culturally respectable manner, often accepting the title “Evangelical.” Since the 1940s, scholarly attempts have been made by evangelicals to reverse the separatist tendencies of fundamentalism while retaining the integrity of traditional confession of biblical faith. These movements are varied in their emphases, but all seem to recognize the intellectual and social problems of sectarianism. One such movement is Neo-Evangelicalism.\footnote{The IFCA also condemns Neo-Evangelicals, and claims they are “characterized by an attempt to accommodate biblical Christianity and make it acceptable to the modern mind.” Cf. 2:D in their Statement of Faith. Website: \url{http://www.ifca.org/}.}

**Neo-Evangelicalism**

Harold Ockenga (1905–1985) played a pivotal role in the attempt to reunite the estranged parties involved in the 1929 Princeton split and revive Princeton theology for a new generation. Ockenga enrolled at Princeton in 1927, but left with Machen for Westminster during the 1929 split. Throughout his life, Ockenga was instrumental in the founding of Fuller Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, The National Association of Evangelicals, and the influential magazine *Christianity Today*. Ockenga sympathized with the fundamentalists’ positions regarding the historicity and authority of Scripture, the miraculous life of Christ, and other orthodox doctrines. However, he was opposed to their separatist tendencies. Ockenga labored for a “new era of Christian influence and effectiveness.” He considered a “new evangelical” one who, “while believing in Traditional orthodoxy, also valued scholarship and took an active concern
for society.”157 After decades of sectarianism, many agreed with Ockenga that “the intellectualist boundaries of fundamentalism were too narrow.” Ockenga and others formed allegiances and sought to intellectually engage modern science and critical research, while maintaining orthodox doctrinal standards.

It is noteworthy for this dissertation that Ockenga and Neo-Evangelicals sought renewal without a robust ecclesiology; his view of a non-authoritative Church reinforced his high view of Scripture, which made him consistent with his predecessors at Princeton. For Ockenga, the Church was comprised of those born of the Spirit, spiritually-quickened individuals united to Jesus Christ. The Church receives its purity from its adherence to the Bible. Apostolic succession refers to doctrine, not a historically continuous episcopate. The Spirit, who anointed the first apostles, imparts apostolicity to the Church. Neo-Evangelicalism is trans-denominational by nature; it intentionally has no central institution or denomination. Its members cohere by doctrinal affirmation, which is directly drawn from Scripture.158

Ockenga and the new evangelicals sought to deal with supposed inconsistencies in the biblical text more effectively than their fundamentalist predecessors through emphasizing scholarly methods of grammatical and historical research practiced in the academy. Ockenga’s efforts were seen in his attempts to openly engage evolution, higher criticism, and various aspects of liberal theology. He did not want to shun modernity while holding to a literalist hermeneutic.


The creation of Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California in 1947 occurred as a result of the new evangelicalism. In time, however, some of these new evangelicals caused a “civil war.” The doctrine of inerrancy in its popular form had been inherited from Princeton and was the core of conservative theology. Yet, some at Fuller began challenging the doctrine and reopening discussion on biblical inspiration. During the ongoing debates, the Bible was kept as the locus of divine revelation, but consensus was not achieved on what that meant. Subsequently, it was determined that some issues were tangential, not germane, such as the form of biblical inspiration and the meaning of inerrancy were not worth ecclesial separation. After the immediate conflict, most sides within the debates over new evangelicalism attempted to maintain a high view of Scripture while emphasizing the need for personal faith. However, the term “inerrant” was frequently replaced with the less complicated “inspired,” a move still bemoaned by some. The Scripture remained the Christian’s one and only authoritative standard; human intellect, feelings, or organized Churches needed to be subject to the Bible.

Biblicists, both evangelical and Neo-Evangelicals, frequently emphasize the extrinsic nature of revelation. The “gospel” is generally something “proclaimed,” an external idea in which people believe and place “confidence.” The “material principle”

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161 Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism, 279.


of the gospel is a message that is “understood,” while the “formal principle is the truth, authority, and finality of the Bible,” the “authority of Scripture.” The message of “justification by faith alone” is the kerygmatic center of our proclamation and common witness; the “biblical doctrine of justification” is the “center of the visible Church.” The center of the literalists’ faith is an idea that is outside of them. In the Bible alone, some argue, God’s most important truths are conveyed in “clarity” through “propositional statements.” God “used language as a means of revelation,” making the text of the Bible the material foundation of faith. For many with this emphasis, Scripture should primarily be interpreted “according to its literal, or normal, sense” by “grammatico-historical exegesis.” Biblical truth therefore becomes “both

165 Ibid.
170 ICBI 2:6.
171 ICBI 1:4.
172 ICBI 2:15.
173 ICBI 1:18.
objective and absolute;”\textsuperscript{174} the meaning of each passage is “single, definite, and fixed,”\textsuperscript{175} and can be sufficiently ascertained through inductive methods.

Other literalists are less interested in objective historical and grammatical analyses of the text of Scripture, and place emphasis on personal, private interpretation. A fresh word from God privately illumines the meaning of a biblical text and often provides immediate, personal application. In this approach to Scripture, one’s personal, private communication with God is stressed. Most of these approaches are distantly connected with the Holiness movement, and presently manifest themselves in revivalist, charismatic, or positive confession contexts. A primary indictment is that these groups merely use Scripture as a springboard to get at their inner selves.\textsuperscript{176}

\textbf{Summary}

Viewed positively, biblical literalism keeps the Scriptures as a standard of divine revelation. In their conviction that the Scriptures are “perfect,”\textsuperscript{177} Biblicists exhibit consistency with historic Christianity’s emphasis that the Bible is the written Word of God. However, the ability to posit an inspired text is weakened when the same evangelical theologians neglect ecclesiology. Hermeneutical methods become hazardous

\textsuperscript{174} ICBI 2:6.

\textsuperscript{175} ICBI 2:7.

\textsuperscript{176} This work will not analyze this approach in depth, but mentions it for the sake of future study. Some of the work associated with “word and faith” charismatics or John Wimber and the Vineyard Church emphasize personal, private illumination of sacred texts. It is not denied here that God can choose to communicate privately to individuals. Instead, the danger of this approach is when people seek private, personal guiding “words” to direct the minutiae of their lives. An excessive reliance on private illumination conflicts with the idea that Christ has given teachers to guide his people. For an evangelical critique of this movement, cf. D. R. McConnell, \textit{A Different Gospel: Biblical and Historical Insights into the Word of Faith Movement} (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1995).

\textsuperscript{177} Psalms 19:7.
when they exclusively focus on extrinsic texts which presume to exist outside of a living, authoritative Church. Despite the positive fact that Scripture is highly regarded in such an approach, this view often neglects biblical passages which speak of the Church. Its high stress on biblical authority misses the fundamental role of Churchly faith in biblical interpretation. It unwittingly risks making the Church superfluous. Such exclusivity contradicts the very spirit of the biblical text and diminishes a supernatural element of Christian faith. On one hand, biblical statements are indeed plain and easily readable, and history and grammar are vital to interpreting holy Writ well. It is positive to affirm that “the Person and work of Jesus Christ are the central focus of the entire Bible.”\textsuperscript{178} On the other hand, it is unclear how such a Christocentric claim for the entire text of the Bible can be made without a teaching Church. Can inductive study alone accomplish such a conclusion?\textsuperscript{179} Can there even be a New Testament without a teaching apostolic ministry providing an authoritative, allegorical faith-reading of the Old?\textsuperscript{180} Only a few evangelicals might support an exclusively inductive approach to Scripture. However, masses are stuck in that indefensible position because they will not acknowledge confidence in pneumatically\textsuperscript{181} placed “teachers”\textsuperscript{182} to explain the Scriptures.


\textsuperscript{179} Cf. 2 Peter 3:16.

\textsuperscript{180} As mentioned in chapter one of this work, cf. Matthew 2:15’s reading of Hosea 11:1, “Out of Egypt have I called my Son,” as fulfilled in the infancy of Jesus. Purely inductive analysis of the passage in Hosea could not come to Matthew’s conclusion. Or, consider the multiple uses of apparently disparate Old Testament texts brought together into a single Christian focus in Hebrews 1. Ultimately, a Christocentric lens provided by an apostolic believing community is needed to make such interpretations. Faith in a living and present Christ is required to “hear” the Scriptures correctly.

\textsuperscript{181} 1 Corinthians 12:4–11.

\textsuperscript{182} Ephesians 4:11.
As an example of such asymmetrical exegetical method, Norman Geisler cites several passages from Church Fathers which support his idea of biblical infallibility, but he ignores the ecclesiastical context from which those authors spoke. He extracts multiple Patristic statements, but neglects what many of the speakers, including oft-despised Origen, taught about the *regula fidei*.\textsuperscript{183} Such oversight is also evident in the three Chicago Statements on inerrancy, hermeneutics, and biblical application.\textsuperscript{184} On one hand, Christ “established his Church on earth and rules it by his Word and Spirit;” the same Holy Spirit who “bears witness”\textsuperscript{185} to the Scriptures also empowers “faithfulness in confession” within the Church.\textsuperscript{186} However, this Church is apparently not to be trusted. In a protective posture, the modern exegete must not allow “Church creed, councils, or declarations” to exercise too much sway in his thinking.\textsuperscript{187} Although the Holy Spirit “enables believers to appropriate and apply the Scriptures,”\textsuperscript{188} such elucidation is seemingly reserved for private moments; while the individual can read Scripture well, the corporate Body appears incapable. The individual is expected to trust, without misgiving, an inspired book written by flawed people, but then exercise suspicion towards the company of people whom the same Bible says was organized by the identical Spirit. The

\textsuperscript{183} Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2002), 282–284. Geisler’s negligence is consistent with his teaching that the Church is universally invisible, and only visible on a local level. Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4 (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2005), 18, 51.

\textsuperscript{184} ICBI 1, 2, and 3.

\textsuperscript{185} ICBI 1:17.

\textsuperscript{186} ICBI 3:3.

\textsuperscript{187} ICBI 1:2.

\textsuperscript{188} ICBI 2:5.
call here is to give greater attention to seeing the Bible and the Church in their unity; it is not intended to give a particular ecclesial body hegemonic authority over Scripture.

The over-emphasis on the “message” of the gospel risks neglecting the Person of Christ present in his Church. The gospel is a person to be engaged, not simply an idea to be believed; the kerygma is the real Jesus, not just an understanding about him. He is living and present in his people; the Church is where he, the gospel itself, is found. By stressing the extrinsic quality of revelation, Biblicists, similar to Catholic manualists, risk losing perspective of the intrinsic aspect of human faith and knowing. The personal nature of revelation is forgotten, resulting in an impersonal, and private, exegesis.

Biblicism has frequently led to treatment of the Bible as if it were naked; it has resulted in multiple manipulations and engendered a hermeneutical separation between faith and exegesis. When left to itself, this approach fails to bring consensus on biblical interpretation, and not uncommonly increases discord among evangelicals. Amazingly, Geisler claims that evangelicalism exhibits more unity than Catholicism because of its across-the-board sole reliance on Scripture. Further, without admitting the failings of exclusive reliance on the text itself, Carson nonetheless expresses hope that evangelicalism can “understand itself” and “resist fragmentation.” However, neither

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189 Cf. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, 92. Geisler admits a noteworthy point regarding perspicuity. He concedes that some truths in Scripture are difficult to understand and challenging to interpret; although the entire text is perspicuous, only the central teachings of the faith are clear. However, Geisler fails to satisfactorily demonstrate how one can determine what is central. Without a universal Church, how can an individual decide which passage is plainest and which is difficult? When a conflict arises, how is the best reading determined? Cf. 2 Peter 3:16 and Ephesians 4:11.

190 Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, 92–93. Geisler’s claim is especially odd considering he has personally been, for decades, at the head of the charge to oust other evangelical scholars from academic fellowships and employment posts due to their nuanced doctrinal differences with him.

191 Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church,” 381.
theologian supports his overly-optimistic statement, nor thoroughly deals with historic fragmentation among those who claimed sole reliance on a putatively perspicuous text.

From the perspective of this dissertation, one danger of contemporary Biblicism is its lack of self-criticism. For example, Donald Carson defensively explains that one valid reason evangelicals do not develop robust ecclesiology is that “most organizations or societies that focus inordinate attention on their own intrinsic nature and internal structure are contaminated with too much introversion and are already sporting signs of decay and death.”

Timothy George acknowledges the need for evangelicals to respond to the modern challenge to “set forth a clear, compelling ecclesiology in the light of new conversations and developing relations with their Roman Catholic brothers and sisters.” However, George, drawing on Carson, partially defends the lack of interest in ecclesiology among evangelicals due to the report that those movements which have traditionally engaged in such “navel-gazing” concurrently exhibit “spiritual decadence.”

George lists three common objections from evangelical scholars explaining why evangelicalism has yet to develop a rigorous ecclesiology. First, they have been preoccupied with other “theological themes,” such as “biblical revelation, religious epistemology, and apologetics.” Second, evangelicals have been “committed”

194 George, “Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology,” in Catholics and Evangelicals, 123–124. George’s “Navel-gazing” phrase was borrowed from Carson (“Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church,” 355.) Note: George’s text, in Rausch, mistakenly cites the publication year as 1900.
195 George, “Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 123.
196 Ibid.
to “evangelism, missions, and Church planting;” therefore, “reflective ecclesiology” has not been a priority. Third, evangelicalism is considered too diverse to develop “one single, or central, evangelical ecclesiology.” 197 For George, the universal Church is a “heavenly and eschatological reality, not an earthly institution to be governed and grasped by mere mortals.” 198 It is visible in “the elect of all the ages,” 199 and as early Reformers said, it can be seen in “local visible congregations” 200 where the Word, the gospel of justification by faith in particular, 201 is rightly preached. 202 “The invisible or universal Church emerges into visibility in the form of local congregations gathered around the faithful preaching of the Word of God.” 203 Those who believe, whether Catholic or otherwise, are joined together by their faith. George cautions against speaking of the Church as a “continuation of the Incarnation” because of the potential of idolatry; Christians must avoid the temptation to put the Church in the place of God. 204 In regards to biblical interpretation, George argues that Scripture should not be interpreted in a vacuum; sola scriptura should not equal nuda scriptura. 205 For George, the Scripture must be the “divine touchstone” to which all “teachings, interpretations, and Traditions of

199 Ibid.
200 George, “Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 129.
202 George, “Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 129.
203 George, “Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 132.
205 George, “Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 140.
the Church” must be subjected.\textsuperscript{206} However, the contemporary exegete cannot “ignore the rich exegetical Tradition of the early Christian writers whose wisdom and insight is vastly superior to the latest word from today’s guilded scholars.”\textsuperscript{207}

Both Carson and George are insufficiently self-critical. It is helpful that George calls for ecclesial reflection. In doing this, he distinguishes himself from most contemporary evangelicals. However, his uncritical use of Reformation ecclesiology does not advance the conversation too much. Both he and Carson merely repeat long-standing convictions; the result is they speak over their “brothers and sisters” in the Catholic Church and in other confessing Christian groups. George, Carson, and other literalists need to go further to consider their own shortcomings. Their insights are needed, but they must unpack their operative assumptions about revelation, ecclesiology, exegesis, and the Catholic Church. While affirming the integrity of Scripture, Biblicists need to be open to new ways of knowing, which are actually not new. Otherwise, the claim “this is the time for evangelicalism to understand itself, to resist fragmentation, to return to basics”\textsuperscript{208} is utopian.

**Evangelical Ressourcement**

The internal polemics over the Bible have exhausted many within evangelicalism, and the dead end reality of liberal activism is no less attractive. Consequently, other evangelicals have recently sought to revitalize the movement by retrieving theological, exegetical, historical, and spiritual resources from pre-Reformation Christianity. They

\textsuperscript{206} George, “Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 140.

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{208} Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church,” 381.
have acknowledged the bankrupt state of the evangelical mind in America, and traced part of the cause to an unnecessary dismissal of Tradition which leads to sole reliance on a naked biblical text. They fear that very “little of the Church’s future is being informed by the Christian past.” “Amnesia” has set in; not only do evangelicals forget their “loved ones and friends,” but they are unable to summon their own identity.

**Thomas Oden**

While still building the Christian faith on the Bible, Thomas Oden, the General Editor of Intervarsity Press’s *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* series, seeks to retrieve classic Christian documents as a method of renewal. He blames the lack of “consensuality” between Christian generations on modern theological chauvinism.

Oden claims that a negative characteristic of modern theologians is the diminution of pre-modern resources. In addition, quality materials from the past, when used, are essentially re-translated into contemporary vernacular. Oden represents a larger movement within evangelicalism which seeks to give ancient Christianity a voice in the modern world by retrieving pre-Reformation literature. Oden’s strategies for Protestant resourcing of Tradition are to largely bypass modernity and medieval Christianity, and directly recover Patristic sources; the texts of “classic Christian teaching” which need to be retrieved were

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primarily formed in the first five centuries of the “common era.” In calling for a rebirth of orthodoxy, he lays great emphasis on a textual retrieval. Specifically, literary texts, methods, and documented pastoral wisdom need to be retrieved in order to satisfy the “hunger for roots,” which remains an “unrelieved tragedy” in the modern “worshipping community.” Oden claims that “Judaism and Christianity both ground themselves in biblical history” which means that “both Jews and Christians are people of the book, students of holy writ.” Therefore, “classic Christianity is most reliably defined by the New Testament itself.” “For Jews this means rabbinic and midrashic teaching; for Christians it means the doctrine taught during the period of ancient ecumenical Christianity.”

Oden calls for a distinct “new ecumenism.” He contrasts his ecumenism with what he considers the failed ecumenism of the twentieth century. Oden claims his ecumenism is grounded in the ancient, and is not suspicious of the past; it is critical of failed modern ideas while not allowing itself to be uncritically accommodating to modernity; it is oriented towards classic Christianity and ecumenical councils, not towards the Enlightenment; it claims to be realistic, not utopian.

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216 Oden, *Rebirth of Orthodoxy*, 16.
To this reader, Oden represents a welcomed wake-up call to examine pre-Reformation Christianity. However, his emphasis on textual retrieval seems to exclude the ecclesial context in which his chosen documents were authored. In several ways, Oden’s resourcing of ancient Tradition could risk pristine retrieval.\(^{220}\) By referring to Christians as people of the book, Oden seems to restrict revelation to the text of the Bible. He appears to think a simple restating of the words of the Fathers is sufficient to renew Christianity. He does not mention the need to return to the main trunk of the living mystery of Christian faith present in a living Church. Oden calls for a “new ecumenism,” where contemporary Christians rediscover their unity with “ancient and contemporary believers.”\(^{221}\) However, his “unity” is primarily comprised of an invisible “personal trust.” It places little value on a structured, historic body of believers. In addition, Oden risks not engaging modernity. Disgusted with particular dead ends of the modern world, he often appears to leap over recent history and the middle ages to the ancient Church. To this reader, Oden demonstrates a need for more robust ecclesiology, where an ongoing living voice of Christ is heard. For Oden, the Fathers had superior voices because they spoke the consensual convictions of all Christians everywhere. However, he does not seem to consider that those voices were superior because they fulfilled sacramental roles as teachers. He criticizes modern theologians for borrowing ideas from the modern world,


but does not seem troubled that Patristic authors, whom he cites, borrowed from their modern world.

**Daniel Williams**

Baker Academic recently published a series of books entitled *Evangelical Ressourcement*. One of the leading contributors, Daniel H. Williams, makes the argument that Patristics again need to be part of the Protestant identity.

Williams’ work is largely corrective, and several of his criticisms of modern evangelicalism resonate with this thesis; he demonstrates the far distance evangelicalism needs to travel. Williams does not seek an “overthrow of Protestant identity,” or simple “ecumenism.” Neither does he think that the Bible alone will address the maladies of modern evangelicalism. Instead, he argues that too much has been thrown away in the name of Reformation; modern evangelicals are inconsistent with the Reformers in that they have cut themselves off from Traditional Patristic sources.222 He argues that appropriation of Patristic sources can renew evangelical vitality. He hopes evangelical *Ressourcement* will help “correct the excesses”223 of unbridled Protestantism. One of the “excesses” Williams addresses is “rampant individualism” in biblical reading. To him, the Bible is too often seen as the believer’s Bible, not the Church’s Bible. He argues that the early Reformers did not imagine reading the Scripture outside of the Church or

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222 Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 214.

223 Ibid.
interpreting Scripture without Tradition as an authoritative guide. The Bible “will fall prey to faulty interpretations” if it “functions in isolation.”

Using Church Fathers, such as Tertullian and Irenaeus, Williams argues that the ideal structure of authority in the interpretation of Scripture was found in a symbiotic relationship between Scripture, Tradition, and the living Church. These three realities inherently complemented each other, and afforded the necessary matrix to concretely locate truth. Williams seeks to stress the catholicity of the Christian faith without diluting evangelical distinctions. Evangelical paranoia over the mention of Tradition, as if it were foreign to inspired Scripture, needs to be amended. It is a false dichotomy because the two cannot be separated.

For Williams, Tradition needs to be distinguished from traditions. The Apostolic Tradition involved a basic understanding of God and salvation in Jesus Christ. These central tenets were distinguishable from peripheral customs of local communities, such as found in Tertullian’s triple immersion. In the early centuries of the Church, the rule of faith was not seen as something extrinsic and added to the faith. Instead, it was an

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226 Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 90. In regards to his symbiotic relationship, Williams is not far from Nevin’s hermeneutical “circle.”

227 Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 218.

228 Ibid.

229 Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 97.
expression of the very life of the Church and the contents of Scripture.\textsuperscript{230} Tradition is the Church’s communal memory and it governs Christian understanding as an authoritative guide. “As such, the Tradition is the various incarnations of the Christian faith.”\textsuperscript{231}

For Williams, Tradition is complex, but not confined to a system; it is a vision and life, not a static method. As such, it is subject to “emendation;”\textsuperscript{232} it is necessarily articulated more clearly over the span of generations. Church Tradition furnished building blocks that later generations, including the Reformation, necessarily drew upon. Tradition is older than any denomination; therefore, it is the fundamental source of the interpretation of holy Writ.\textsuperscript{233} It is only when Scripture is read through the lens of Tradition that a spiritual interpretation of the text is possible.\textsuperscript{234} The Bible must be read in light of “the consensus of the Fathers” if modern theology hopes to “accurately” represent the message of Scripture.

For Williams, contemporary evangelicals err when they set Church Tradition against Scripture because the two have always been “comprehended in reciprocal terms.”\textsuperscript{235} The principle of \textit{sola scriptura} was never intended to be \textit{nuda scriptura}.\textsuperscript{236} Williams, claiming to follow John Wesley, interprets \textit{sola} to mean “primarily,” not

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Williams2017} Williams, \textit{Retrieving the Tradition}, 97.
\bibitem{Williams2016} Williams, \textit{Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation}, 24.
\bibitem{Williams2017b} Williams, \textit{Retrieving the Tradition}, 137.
\bibitem{Williams2017c} Williams, \textit{Retrieving the Tradition}, 205.
\bibitem{Williams2016b} Williams, \textit{Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation}, 27.
\bibitem{Williams2016c} Williams, \textit{Evangelicals and Tradition}, 93.
\bibitem{Williams2016d} Williams, \textit{Evangelicals and Tradition}, 97.
\end{thebibliography}
“exclusively.”237 “Anyone” can figure out the literal or historic meaning of the text, but the full purport of Scripture is only gained through the body of Tradition.238 For Williams, the Church was the framework within which the symbiotic relationship between Scripture and Tradition occurred. For Irenaeus, apostolicity referred to the historical lineage of current bishops; they were able to trace their lineage back to the apostles. Irenaeus would never have settled for a “spiritual-only” succession of bishops because that would fall into his enemies’ traps. It was the Gnostics who stressed mere “spiritual transmission of truth.”239 For Williams, the true Church has handed Scripture and Tradition down to the present generation. The Church, therefore, must be more than the judge between right and wrong thinking. It is also the provider, and therefore, guardian, of those truths.240

Williams and other Protestant **Ressourcement** theologians helpfully introduce their readers to Patristic sources. By doing this, they provide access to a degree of evangelical renewal. However, they do not seem to highlight the name of the living librarian of those resources. How can Protestants meaningfully utilize Patristic resources without theologically facing the living Catholic Church, in whose life stream those texts were written? Can a Protestant grasp the spirit of Patristic texts and creeds without sympathetically reading them from within a Catholic setting?

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238 Williams, *Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation*, 27.

239 Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 90.

240 Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 89.
Reformed Catholicity

Several attempts have been made recently to stimulate evangelical renewal by incorporating ecclesiology into Reformed theology.\textsuperscript{241} Sometimes termed “Reformed Catholicity,” many of these efforts are motivated by an apparent desire to affirm traditional dogmatic confessions, perform their work with astute scholarship, and genuinely retrieve deep resources within Calvin and other early Reformed authors. Some, such as Littlejohn, have focused on retrieving Mercersburg’s Reformed theologians. However, many of these retrievals stop short of where they need to go. As mentioned in the opening of this dissertation, this author’s growing concern is that some evangelicals are satisfied with “reformed and evangelical retrieval,”\textsuperscript{242} a “creative unfolding of the Reformed tradition,”\textsuperscript{243} or a ruled reading of “Holy Scripture on the basis of Reformed theological and ecclesiological principles.”\textsuperscript{244} The problem is these curative attempts somewhat misdiagnose the problem. Any effort at Protestant, Reformed, or evangelical \textit{Ressourcement} will be flawed from the beginning. This is because the theologian’s effort to return Scripture to its ecclesial \textit{Sitz im Leben} necessarily includes critical empathy for the living Catholic Church. The historical and theological significance of the Catholic Church for biblical exegesis is too important to ignore. Similarly, recent attempts to

\textsuperscript{241} As mentioned earlier, some Reformed thinkers may prefer to be classified separately from evangelicals. However, they are placed together in this work under the heading of “Evangelical.”


\textsuperscript{243} Littlejohn, \textit{The Mercersburg Theology and the Quest for Reformed Catholicity}, 126.

\textsuperscript{244} Michael Allen and Scott Swain, \textit{Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation}, 96.
retrieve creeds\textsuperscript{245} and other ancient Christian traditions are admirable, but also fall short. They retrieve documents, but walk past the living librarian of those creeds and traditions. While maintaining critical distance, the evangelical theologian must attempt, as much as is possible, to understand the relation between Church and Bible from inside a Catholic perspective.

**Summary**

In some ways, this dissertation can be classified as an attempt at Evangelical *Ressourcement*. The combination of scholarly efforts and traditional dogmatic confession within works of Evangelical *Ressourcement* resonates with some of the concerns of this author. However, the lack of critical empathy with the living Catholic Church is a recurring disappointment. One cannot arrive at the fullness of Christian faith by Bible alone, consensuality between Christian generations, charismatic experience, ecumenical creeds, or John Calvin. True *Ressourcement* includes renewed “sympathy” for what has been critiqued.

**Communal Hermeneutic**

Communal hermeneutics is used in this dissertation to distinguish several\textsuperscript{246} efforts to incorporate community, especially ecclesiology, into evangelical theology. Many of these endeavors currently influence developments within evangelical exegesis of Scripture. Some of the emphases within these models resonate with this dissertation because they seek to create new hermeneutical standards with an ecclesial form. They

\textsuperscript{245} Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative*.

\textsuperscript{246} They are several in number and variation. This dissertation will only provide a cursory description of some of the more influential trends within the movement.
have sought to move away from both an overemphasis on an extrinsic analysis of the biblical text and an overly-subjective, individual hermeneutic. Despite appreciation for some of these efforts, they need to go further; some need to change direction.

The broader philosophical movement within which these evangelicals operate is often called “postliberal.” Representatives of this movement frequently react against “homogenizing tendencies” which assume uniformity. They distance themselves from “traditional Enlightenment appeal” to universal rationality, and they challenge the liberal assumption that an “immediate religious experience” is common to all humanity. Instead, they emphasize the significance of gaining knowledge “through the values, experiences, and language” of particular communities. The community, not the individual, frequently becomes the locus of observation. In this approach, analysis of communal narrative is vital to properly interpreting the experiences and values of a culture. According to several authors, one value of this approach is the status given to voices from smaller communities.

This dissertation uses the label “Communal Hermeneutic,” in an attempt to include diverse representatives in this growing movement within evangelicalism. Concern for theological orthodoxy and personal faith has led various participants to reconsider the relevance of ecclesiology in biblical exegesis. Communal hermeneutics developed partially as an attempt to get beyond the polemics between conservative and liberal theologians within evangelicalism, both of which were considered overly

247 The term, as most terms, is broad. It is next to impossible to unify multiple, diverse movements with a single term. Some of the authors mentioned in this section might object to the labels given to them here.

individualistic. Some of the deficiencies they identify in prevalent hermeneutic constructs include a disinterest in the structures of human consciousness, an inadequate explanation of human action, not accounting for the historical development of communal traditions, and insufficiently recognizing the importance of story-telling relative to human epistemology. Many specifically wish to “provide alternatives” to “foundationalists” “or other scientific epistemologies.” Within evangelicalism, communal hermeneutists have reacted against both the systematics of Geisler and similar thinkers represented by the Chicago statements as well as classic liberal suppositions of universal experience. Often called “narrative theologians,” they contend that all thought and experience is “historically and socially” mediated on a communal level; universal claims within the Christian Tradition need to be deconstructed before being applied to a particular people group. The multiple layers of meaning in the Bible logically require “ambiguity” in one’s

249 An additional distinction postliberal evangelicals might make between themselves and liberal theologians is openness to the supernatural. Generally, evangelicals on both sides of the debates between conservative biblicalists and postliberal evangelicals dismiss the baseless anti-supernaturalism of some nineteenth-century presuppositions. Two examples of modern liberal theologians who would not fit into evangelical categories illustrate the distinction postliberal evangelicals make for themselves: Marcus Borg, and Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong. Borg is a prolific author associated with the Jesus Seminar. He sees the Resurrection of Jesus as immensely important for Christian faith, but empties the doctrine of its physical dimension. For Borg, the resurrection of Jesus was not necessarily bodily. Cf. www.marcusjborg.com. Spong appreciates the Scriptures as valuable testimonies of individual religious experiences, but does not regard them as supernatural. He argues that belief in the miraculous claims of Scripture, such as supported by the five fundamentals drafted back in the early twentieth century, is “not just naïve, but eminently rejectable.” Although he is an Episcopalian priest, Spong does “not define God as a supernatural being.” The upshot of this to Spong is he “cannot interpret Jesus as the earthly incarnation” of God because God is not a being. For Spong, there was no Virgin Birth, no Incarnation, and no physical resurrection. Further, Jesus did not establish a Church replete with an enduring hierarchy. Neither Borg nor Spong can reasonably be classified as evangelical due to their anti-supernatural biases, and they might welcome such disassociation. Cf. John Shelby Spong, A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith Is Dying and How a New Faith Is Being Born (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 1–5; and John Shelby Spong, Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 105–108.
hermeneutics. In their efforts to prevent the arrogance of dogmatic propositions, postliberal thinkers frequently place narrative theology above systematics; the biblical text is best understood within communal dialogue, not from hierarchical declarations. Some evangelicals within this broader movement have sought to maintain what they consider to be classic theological confession.

Generally, the evangelical postliberal movement does not allow the individual exegete or ordained clergy to have the final word in biblical interpretation. Instead, “the Bible is to be interpreted by the people, for the people.” An “authoritative community,” where “conversation allows life to flow while living amongst one another” is the safest setting for interpreting Scripture. This democratic approach to biblical interpretation is one of the reasons that Jesus’ parables are preferred over Pauline didactics within communal hermeneutics. The parables allow for interactive readership, “forcing the reader into a radical reader-response role,” where theological truth is primarily discovered through narrative.


252 Sexton, “Emerging Church Hermeneutics,” 162.

253 Sexton, “Emerging Church Hermeneutics,” 161. Several evangelicals have utilized the works of Jacques Derrida and Stanley Fish, among others, to enhance their ideas of deconstruction and reader-response theory.

254 Legaspi mentions Brevard Childs, among others, as critiquing some postmodern methods which “refuse to give priority to historical and philological inquiry as traditionally practiced.” Some of these trends have actually contributed to the incoherence of modern biblical studies. Legaspi, The Death of Scripture, 7.
Stanley Hauerwas

For Stanley Hauerwas, narrative theology is vital to interpreting the biblical text. Biblical “literature is meant to be read as a story with a beginning and a progression.” 255 The Scriptures were formed as a long narrative of loosely connected “subplots.” 256 They are a truthful 257 story of peoples’ encounters with God. Over time, biblical subplots created the framework for interpreting new encounters with God; what had “already been created by previous acts, remembered in the Tradition” 258 provided parameters for the community to decipher its own world. Specific biblical narratives, and the characters portrayed in them, were intelligible only as they participated in the broader narrative framework, subsequently guiding the conversations in the modern world. 259

For Hauerwas, the narrative of Jesus particularly forms the Christian community; “the Church is the organized form of Jesus’ story.” 260 Jesus provides a contrasting view of what it means to live in the world; he breaks down the “arbitrary and false boundaries between people.” 261 The “particularity of Jesus’ story” is therefore the basis of the “universality of the Church.” 262 By “Church” Hauerwas is not referring to a particular

255 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 67.

256 Ibid.

257 Cf. Hauerwas, Community of Character, 49–52. Hauerwas considers a story “truthful” which, drawing from the Tradition, is nurturing and transformative in the contemporary world. He is not necessarily equating facticity with truthfulness. The truthfulness of a story is not discovered by historical investigation, but by the people “being the kind of people who can bear the burden of that story with joy” (p. 52).

258 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 67.

259 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 61.

260 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 50–51.

261 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 51.

262 Ibid.
denomination, he does not think the ideal Church currently exists. However, authoritative communities do exist with traditions rooted in Christian faith and Scriptures. The Church can be considered “an international society” in that “we have a story that teaches us to regard the other as a fellow member of God’s kingdom.” “We have a common experience” of being trained as true disciples. “In contrast to all other societies,” the “Christian community is formed by a story that enables its members to trust the otherness of the other as the very sign of the forgiving character of God’s Kingdom.”

For Hauerwas, Scripture is dependent on the Church; it could not exist or have authority without the ecclesial community. The “formation of the biblical “texts,” as well as the entire “canon,” are the result of the “courage of a community to constantly remember and reinterpret its past.” The Scriptures are a testimony of a community that “knows its life depends on faithful remembering of God’s care.”

For Hauerwas, the contemporary authority of the Scriptures comes from their ability to nurture and transform modern communities of faith. They do not gain their authority because of the “unsupportable claims” regarding their unity or supposed

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Hauerwas, Community of Character, 51.

Hauerwas, Community of Character, 50–51.

Hauerwas, Community of Character, 53.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Hauerwas, Community of Character, 55.

Hauerwas, Community of Character, 67.
inerrant nature. The idea of “revelation” or “revealed morality” is actually a problem. Instead, Scripture is meant to enable a community’s “journey from where it is to where it ought to be.” The Bible therefore “functions as an authority for Christians” in that it “helps us remember the stories of God for the continual guidance for our community and individual lives.” It necessarily helps the “Church to be a community sufficiently truthful so that our conversations with one another and God can continue across generations.” Scripture and Tradition are meant to guide the conversation, not control it. Although interpretations of the modern world are made within the framework of Tradition, new understandings are constantly needed; “constant adjustment” is necessary “if the current community is to stay in continuity with Tradition.” In this sense, “justified discontinuity is not unjustified.” The narratives of Scripture were not meant to describe our world,” but were intended to “change” it. The authority of the Bible is not intended to “serve as a final court of appeals for theological disputes.” In the modern day, the Scripture provides authoritative “frames of reference,” not final commands, within which new experiences gain meaning and “make

271 Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 63.
273 Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 63.
274 Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 66.
275 Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 64.
276 Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 64.
277 Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 61.
278 Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 64.
sense.” In Scripture itself, “at crucial periods in the life of Israel and the Church,” “questions about how to remember the stories were not just questions about fact or accuracy, but about what kind of community we must be to be faithful.”

For Hauerwas, theology is rootless without a believing community. Hauerwas censures those who use Scripture to “reduce faith in Jesus to formulas.” Classical Protestantism circumvented the “conversational process, in favor of its insistence on the perspicuity and objectivity of the words of Scripture.” Hauerwas is similarly critical of historicists who separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith. The demand for historical accuracy misses the point of how people should “follow” Jesus; the truthfulness of a story “requires our lives to be changed.” For Hauerwas, this means knowing how to live; community is essential to such knowledge, and it is the Church which, through its Traditions, provides the “conditions” needed to interpret “what is going on in our lives.”

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280 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 67.

281 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 36.

282 The quote is John Yoder’s, from “Radical Reformation Ethics in Ecumenical Perspective,” Journal of Ecumenical Studies (Fall 1978): 657. Quoted in Hauerwas, Community of Character, 54.

283 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 37–38, 51.

284 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 42.

285 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 47.

286 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 62.

287 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 50.
The Bible, for Hauerwas, therefore is not an authority because it “sets a standard of orthodoxy,” but because the “traditions of Scripture provides the means for our community to find new life.”\(^{288}\) Contemporary theology must be conscious of the Bible’s communal context.\(^ {289}\) Hauerwas complains that many theologians are insufficiently familiar with the biblical texts; many “know the current theories about the development of the text better than the text itself.” The text is not taken seriously enough\(^ {290}\) when the “religious” or “narrative” settings in which the texts were published are neglected.\(^ {291}\)

For Hauerwas, critical analyses of the text and its history are essential to hermeneutics, but ultimately incomplete without narrative. Christian narrative creates a new world for the community and individual, which Biblicists and historicists cannot accomplish. To be relevant, the story of Jesus cannot be anything less than a social interpretation of his life.\(^ {292}\) “There is no way to speak of Jesus’ story without its forming our own.”\(^ {293}\) “To be a disciple means to share Christ’s story, to participate in the reality of God’s rule.”\(^ {294}\) Specifically, the disciple learns about Christian rules when he practices loving one’s enemies, being forgiven and showing forgiveness, serving as Christ served, and being freed from the fear of death.\(^ {295}\) The Christian, then, learns what discipleship is

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\(^ {288}\) Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 63.

\(^ {289}\) Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 40.

\(^ {290}\) Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 56.

\(^ {291}\) Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 57.


\(^ {293}\) Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 51.

\(^ {294}\) Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 49.

\(^ {295}\) Ibid.
by living the life. This “knowledge” of the Scriptures transcends doctrinal facts or historical particulars.296

Hauerwas’s identification of the disjointedness between the communal nature of revelation and extrinsic hermeneutical models is beneficial. While carefully affirming the need for biblical, grammatical, and historical studies, he argues that those efforts are shortsighted without an analysis of the community’s role in creating and sustaining Scripture. Further, he argues that communal Traditions are the seedbed for all authoritative texts; the Bible is essentially dependent on the Church. A microscopic analysis of a particular text of Scripture will ultimately be distorted if it is not conveyed in its narrative setting. Hauerwas also demonstrates a willingness to dialogue and learn from others on these issues, thus demonstrating a healthy sense of community in his approach.

However, much of what he conveys seems to diminish, even if unintentionally, the sacramental aspect of the community and its Traditions. While highlighting the role of communal narrative in the human development of the sacred text, Hauerwas allows the sound of Scripture as a divine Word to fade into the background. He points out the dangers of overemphasizing the unity of the biblical texts, and suggests that an uncultivated idea of revelation can be problematic. Yet, while it is true that traditions sometimes conflict over how best to interpret biblical texts, Hauerwas seems to reduce God’s word for his people to a whisper. The question also arises to what degree Hauerwas’ “community” is an ecclesial society. It is understood that his community is

296 Hauerwas, Community of Character, 47.
comprised of human persons centered on Jesus’ narrative, a story-formed community; but, to what extent is it a pneumatically organized society? And, from where does that narrative generate? Hauerwas rightly criticized those who separated the biblical text from its narrative context, but might the context of the Catholic Church, replete with hierarchy, deserve more attention? Certainly, no one author can pursue all necessary paths of discussion. To his credit, Hauerwas is a leading Protestant voice in dialogue with Catholics; however, it would be beneficial to further probe the pneumatic importance of that particular community.

**Miroslav Volf**

Miroslav Volf is another theologian sensitive to the rampant individualism within Protestant theology. While he writes to a broad audience, he has specifically influenced evangelical streams of thought. Volf historically situates “all” current “Christianity” in a “congregationalizing” moment; “a global transformation” has been occurring for the last half century. Specifically, Volf sees Christianity as “shedding its European forms of enculturation and is becoming a genuine global religion with its varied forms of enculturation.” Volf labels congregations within this rapidly developing phenomenon as “Free Churches.” These congregations are noticeable by their “flexibility with respect

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to filling leadership roles.” Volf sets up the “congregationalism” of the Free Church model as positive, and contrary to a “hierarchical structure,” such as is evident in the Catholic Church. The Free Churches in particular promote “differentiation of societies, the privatization of decision, and generalization of values, and inclusion.”

Volf critiques the ecclesiologies of Catholic Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Orthodox Metropolitan John Zizioulas and roots his complaints in their Trinitarian theologies; their ecclesiologies resemble their distinct monarchial or hierarchical understandings of the Trinity. Volf considers both Ratzinger’s and Zizioulas’ theologies as “reformulations of premodern Traditions,” while his own are “postmodern” and “prophetic.”

For Volf, Ratzinger’s theology emphasizes “the perspective of the whole” to a fault. The idea of the “one” dominates all understandings of the Trinity. A pure relation exists between Father, Son, and Spirit, which, according to Volf, results in a loss in emphasis in their “specific personal selfhood.” Volf argues that “for this reason, trinitarian unity is also not a differentiated unity of persons, standing in these

302 Volf, After Our Likeness, 12.
303 Volf, After Our Likeness, 12–13.
304 Volf, After Our Likeness, 13.
305 As of Volf’s writing, Ratzinger was not yet Benedict XVI. This section will maintain Volf’s use of “Ratzinger.”
307 Volf, After Our Likeness, 23.
308 Volf, After Our Likeness, 72.
309 Volf, After Our Likeness, 71.
relations.” For Volf, this dominance of the pure unity of the one in Trinity has significant ecclesiastical repercussions. “A monistic structure for the Church emerges from this.” The one divine substance corresponds to the one Church, and together with Christ, “constitutes one subject” capable of action. Therefore, when Christ acts, God acts. In Ratzinger, Volf claims, this divine unity of action is transferred to the pope as the head of the one universal Church and bishops as heads of local Churches. It therefore demands a hierarchical structure. Just as the one substance of God is “over Christ,” so the unity of the Church is established by one pope “over” the bishops and bishops “over” individual members. Pure Trinitarian relations, when transferred to the Church, relativize the individual persons and congregations. For Volf, this results in a loss of the “notion of the rights of persons;” the individual nowhere stands on his own, and his only recourse is the “goodwill of the hierarchs themselves.”

Volf does not criticize Zizioulas for giving priority to the oneness of God, but to the divine Father in particular. According to Volf, the headship of the Father takes too much precedence in Zizioulas’ theology. “The unity of God is grounded not in the one divine substance,” as with Ratzinger, “but rather in the person of the Father, which is why

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310 Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 70.
312 Ibid.
315 Ibid.
the one substance of God does not enjoy ontological priority over the persons.”

God’s personal “mode of existence,” as Father, constitutes the divine substance. Zizoulos notes the “revolutionary nature” of “development” in Greek thought caused by early Christian theologians, specifically the Cappadocians: “prosopon” became identified with “hypostasis.” The upshot of this was that “person was no longer an adjunct to being.” The individual entity could now trace his being “to being,” to the person. In Trinitarian theology, this meant that “God’s being coincided with God’s personhood.”

God the Father was now not only the source of the Son and Spirit, but the “personal” cause. Zizioulas himself argued that “the one God is not the one substance but the Father, who is the ‘cause’ both of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit.” “God ‘exists’ on account of a person, the Father, and not on account of a substance.” To Volf, Zizioulas’ trinitarian theology negatively affected his ecclesiology.

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316 Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 201. Although his work is distinct from Volf’s, Braaten claims to identify an undeveloped “point of contact between Lutheran and Orthodox ecclesiology.” Braaten advocates a form of “communion-ecclesiology” which “lays stress on the ontological priority of the local church.” Braaten, *Mother Church*, 7–8.


320 Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 76.

321 Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 76.

322 Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 41.

323 Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 42.
For Zizioulas, the “bishop represents Christ to the congregation and simultaneously embodies in himself the whole congregation.” Volf’s concern with Zizioulas’ view is that even though the bishop stands in community with the people, the relationship is actually one of “asymmetrical bipolarity.” The bishop acts, and the congregation receives. In the end, for Volf, this is simply another form of episcopal hierarchy.

Volf argues that the Trinity should be looked at as a social trinity, similar to the views of Jürgen Moltman and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Under his subheading “Perichoretic personhood,” Volf argues that the Trinity needs to be understood “in their mutual giving and receiving,” as not only “interdependent, but also mutually internal.” In every divine person, “the other persons also indwell.” Any distinctions “are precisely the presupposition of that interiority.” The catholicity of the divine persons emerges from their interiority.

Volf argues, from his perspective of the Trinity, that the Church should not be viewed as a “single subject, but rather a communion of interdependent subjects.” One communion is not the cause of the rest. In addition, salvation needs to be understood as

324 Volf, After Our Likeness, 224.
325 Volf, After Our Likeness, 198. Volf is giving emphasis to seeing the trinity in relation.
326 Volf, After Our Likeness, 208–210. Perichoresis is a term which generally emphasizes the internal relations of the persons of the Christian Trinity. It allows the individuality of each divine person to be maintained, but places emphasis on the shared life of the three. McGrath reports that the etymology of the term suggests “mutual interpenetration.” With this emphasis, the Trinity is viewed as a “community of Being” (McGrath, Christian Theology, 241).
327 Volf, After Our Likeness, 208. Italics are Volf’s.
328 Volf, After Our Likeness, 209.
329 Volf, After Our Likeness, 224.
mediated through “all” members of the Church, not just through “office-holders.” Finally, the Church is pneumatically constituted through the “communal confession in which Christians speak the word of God to one another;” they are not constituted “so much by way of the institution of office.” Volf’s internally penetrating ecclesiology means that the entire Church exists in each individual congregation. The Church is fundamentally a “polycentric community;” therefore, it “cannot be episcopocentric.” Volf is careful to cite numerous biblical passages to support his claim that Church life should be modeled as “polycentric-participative,” in a “Free Church fashion.” He sees the entire Christian world slowly but noticeably moving away from hierarchical models to “participative models of Church configuration.”

Volf is to be commended for his intense efforts at “ecumenical dialogue” with major Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiologies. He has traveled much further down the road in this regard than most evangelicals. Volf also is to be admired for attempting to salvage the idea of “Church.” Even as a Protestant, he does not quickly toss the biblical term. He realizes the importance of constructing a meaningful ecclesiology in the modern world. Unfortunately, even though Volf wrote After Our Likeness nearly twenty years ago, only a few evangelicals have followed in his wake to penetrate what ecclesiology means for

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330 Volf, After Our Likeness, 224.
331 Ibid.
332 Volf, After Our Likeness, 227.
333 Volf, After Our Likeness, 12.
334 Volf, After Our Likeness, 23.
the contemporary evangelical. It is hoped that this dissertation will generate further considerations.

Despite compliments for Volf’s work, several criticisms should be noted. First, the accuracy of some of Volf’s assumptions needs to be checked. His categorization of Ratzinger’s and Zizioulas’ theologies as “reformulations of premodern Traditions,” assuming they lack a prophetic voice like his own, is problematic. Beyond any hubris, his use of “premodern” possibly betrays his own optimistic assumptions regarding what really occurred in the Enlightenment, and negative assumptions about what preceded it. He seems to assume that the frozen stem of a Church living in divine mystery thankfully withered and died in the sixteenth century, only to be revived in the spring of the “free Church” ecclesiology of Baptist John Smyth in the early seventeenth century. With his presumed discontinuity, Volf fails to show how “the word of Christ remains present in history.” Are the true prophets now only in the free churches? Volf’s dismissal of outdated hierarchy is reminiscent of Braaten’s wrong perception that the Catholic Church went through a “revolution” at the Second Vatican Council. He seems to misunderstand continuity. Volf claims that Christianity is finally becoming a “global religion” thanks to free Churches with “their own varied forms of enculturation.”

However, just as John Paul II’s *Sollicitudo rei socialis* and *Centesimus Annus* reminded

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336 Ibid.


certain critics that the Catholic Church has always had an option for the poor, it appears that Volf needs a reminder that Christianity has perpetually striven to be a global faith. Volf also unnecessarily sets hierarchy and congregation against each other after asserting Trinity as an interpenetrating community of beings. The purpose of this dissertation is not to argue for a particular type of ecclesiology; however, it seems plausible that a hierarchical model of ecclesiology could function with congregational ideas. Volf’s emphasis that the whole is present in the particular, that the universal Church is present in each congregation, is theologically insightful. However, could not the divine Father, whom Jesus said is “greater than I,” also be essentially equal with the Son? Does hierarchy necessarily have to oppress a congregational voice? Ratzinger actually makes a fair distinction between traditions and Tradition. Volf does not adequately consider the depth of the Second Vatican Council’s idea of “collegial union” between particular churches and the universal Church. Much of the unity he longs for between the particular and universal has already been suggested in Catholic documents.

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341 John 14:28. Often considered to be greater in function, not essentially greater.


343 LG, 23. “This collegial union is apparent also [in] the mutual relations of the individual bishops with particular churches and with the universal Church.”
Popular and Influential

Certain evangelicals who operate within a communal hermeneutic paradigm might be considered more popular than academic. However, their influence is significant and warrants mention at this point.

Several within the emergent Church intentionally deconstruct dogmatic claims in order to produce a fresh, relevant explication of Scripture. For example, Brian McLaren often uses Christian motifs to provoke conversation on social and political dilemmas in society. In the process, McLaren frequently evacuates theological concepts, such as eternal life, Kingdom of God, and salvation of significant spiritual dimensions in favor of almost exclusively social and political application. On one hand, McLaren calls for Jesus to be considered the “revelation of God’s character.”\textsuperscript{344} On the other hand, he clearly restricts how one can look at Jesus for that purpose; he primarily projects a political and social Jesus. McLaren makes little allowance for the Church, modern or ancient, to instruct him on a full-orbed image of Jesus which might include McLaren’s temporal, narrative concerns. His call for an understanding of biblical terms which includes present day injustices is obviously attractive to some; however, his conclusions seem to misfire because he seeks to understand biblical concepts strictly within his own narrow outlook. He does not consider that ecclesiology broadens, not restricts, one’s thinking. In the end, he dismisses the ecclesial structure in which the original ideas of Jesus were first communicated.\textsuperscript{345}


Distinct from McLaren, others who might be located within the broader communal hermeneutic spectrum seem to appreciate rigorous grammatical efforts and traditional faith conclusions; however, their use of religious language is still generally based on local social dialogue. As examples, evangelicals Rick Brown and John Travis\textsuperscript{346} utilize insight into particular Muslim communities to guide their evangelization.\textsuperscript{347} Brown favors Bible translations for Muslims which replace the term “Son of God” with less offensive terms, such as Beloved of God or Messiah. Brown claims that the Nicene fathers and their heirs might have been “theologically correct,” but were “exegetically wrong” to assert that the title Son of God contains clear reference to Jesus’ deity.\textsuperscript{348} Based on his conclusions, Brown posits local missional advantages to cease using the term Son of God in Bible translations. Brown does not seem to make the connection between exegesis and ecclesial faith. How could the Fathers be exegetically wrong if they were theologically correct? John Travis justifies replacing the biblical term Christian with Messianic Muslim due to the perceived resonance the term Christian has among Muslims. The social dynamics of certain Muslim communities helps lead him to his conclusions. In addition, Travis encourages new “followers of Isa” to be free to appear as Muslims as they worship in Messianic mosques, as long as each individual believer “really feels called of God” to do so. How much each private Messianic mosque affirms

\textsuperscript{346} A pseudonym.


\textsuperscript{348} Brown, \textit{The Son of God}, 49.
about Islam will corporately be “determined” as each group studies the “Bible together and are guided by the Holy Spirit.”349 As noble as Travis’ efforts are, he does not see the need for theological language and practices to be in tune with the universal Church. He makes enormous theological decisions based on local, parochial sensitivities. As representatives of a large evangelical movement of missiologists related to the “Insider Movement,” Brown and Travis seek to get at the “original” meaning of biblical terms in a manner that can relevantly be presented to the modern Muslim world. Their cultural sensitivity and grammatical abilities are valuable; however, they demonstrate little concern over ecclesiastical input on how best to use theological language. They express little confidence in the Spirit’s ability to universally lead Christ’s followers “into all truth”350 while determining the best use of sacred terms. Their eagerness to alter universally traditional terms for particular communities seems to suggest an arbitrary quality to religious language. It diminishes a providential understanding of language incarnated at the “fullness of time.”351 They primarily use local sociological and grammatical tools when addressing issues of universal significance. In the end, they risk inserting their own preferences. On the surface, this might seem innocuous; but, this particular issue has caused intense disunion among evangelicals over the last two decades.352

349 Travis, “Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa,” 55–56.
351 Galatians 4:4.
352 In 2008, the Catholic Church formally responded to an analogous development, when some Catholic feminist theologians argued that an alteration to the baptismal formula from “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” to “Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier” or “Creator, Liberator, Sustainer” be accepted. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), supported by Pope Benedict XVI, rejected the suggested alteration in the baptismal formula. The sacred terms uttered by Christ were not allowed to be altered due to local social
Evangelical thinkers who engage in communal hermeneutics express a healthy desire to move away from the individualistic, subjective reading of Scripture which has often plagued American evangelical Christianity. However, it appears their authoritative communities are little more than larger individual entities. The private subject has been replaced with a small assembly or local focus group. They have no mechanism for universal determinations on the meaning of Scripture even if it were determined necessary. Over time, this lack of a universal foundation in their theological epistemology might further hamper evangelicalism’s ability to maintain orthodox confession and Christian unity.

Often, evangelical demystification of Christian faith is unintentional, and it sometimes occurs at the hands of those who consider their work to be a retrieval of the original message of Jesus. For example, Alan Hirsch is an innovative and influential evangelical leader in the missional Church movement. However, his attempt to discover the “formula that unlocks the secrets of the ecclesial universe” sets an “organic image of Church” over against “any mechanistic and institutional” conception. Hirsch claims the “organic” model was Jesus’ original intention. He suggests that Church life should follow God’s original “pattern of life” evident throughout the universe; the Church


should seek a more “life-oriented approach to mission, ministry, and community.”\textsuperscript{355} The marks of biological living systems, according to Hirsch, should be reflected in Church life; they include innate intelligence, interconnectedness, change, and adaptation.\textsuperscript{356} However, Hirsch seems to overlook that living systems throughout the world are hierarchically organized; biological life is replete with well-defined structure. Although Hirsch admits that “Christian mission” starts with Jesus and is “defined by him,”\textsuperscript{357} he seems to forget that it was Jesus who established an ordered society; the Spirit was sent by Jesus to operate within the infant Church, giving the Church a clearly delineated structure from the outset. As with many evangelicals, Hirsch appears to have difficulty imagining the equal necessity of flesh and spirit in incarnational Church life.

**Summary**

Those engaging in communal hermeneutics are to be commended for attempting to find a healthy place for both the individual and community through active “ecclesiastical” constructions. Their efforts demonstrate that they perceive the Scripture to be fresh and relevant for the modern world, and that the Bible is a communal book. However, some of the “postmodern”\textsuperscript{358} reflections need to extend their critique beyond the Enlightenment. As they hopefully attempt to discover the One who is ever present in the Church, they need to construct models which emphasize continuity within Christian

\textsuperscript{355} Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 181.


\textsuperscript{357} Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 142.

\textsuperscript{358} Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 23.
Tradition. In some sense, the object should be to search out an already ever present
Beauty in the Church, analogous to what Augustine called ancient and new.

Conclusion

While some evangelical theological trends offer restrained hope, many do not. In the end, evangelicals often fall prey to the modernism they claim to resist. They employ many imaginative ways of interpreting the Scriptures, but never really move away from some form of individualism. Although the theological range and academic competence of evangelicals is varied, a latent assumption that universal ecclesiology is unnecessary to modern biblical interpretation is still noticeable in many groups. Further, some who see the need for ecclesiology in biblical exegesis wrongly think it can be achieved without directly engaging the Catholic Church. Those presumptions need to be revisited.

The common postulations behind evangelical interpretation of Scripture need to be reevaluated. The movement brings considerable good into Christ’s Church, but its weak ecclesiology spoils much of the fruit. Some evangelicals are not dismissive of ecclesiology. However, while acknowledging Jesus’ promise that the Spirit will lead his followers into truth, most of them have not yet understood that the structured Church, both historic and contemporary, is the means by which the Spirit leads. Efforts to “affirm,” “hope,” and “search together” have yet to determine that a formal ecclesial context is where the Scriptures are to be read and explained. It would be naïve to


suggest that severe polemics occur less frequently in Catholicism. However, ecclesiology enables the Catholic Church to establish universal parameters for theological polemics, maintain the mystical element of faith in dogmatic confession, and keep viable unity among its people. Evangelicalism lacks such a mechanism.

The final chapter of this dissertation will seek to highlight practical ways evangelicals can dialogue with the Catholic Church in biblical exegesis. For the purpose of the unity of the faith, evangelicals should seek to develop exegetical methods which are essentially ecclesial. As Andrew Louth wrote, if one cannot trust the Church, then he has lost Jesus. Unless critical reassessment occurs, the progress evangelicals think they are making will be self-deception. As with Sisyphus, the large boulder will keep rolling back down the hill.

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catholic soteriology as “salvation by works.” Although important distinctions between different Protestant and Catholic soteriologies do exist, Catholic salvation is clearly presented as a work of Christ’s grace. Real differences exist between Catholics and evangelicals. However, the continuation of pseudo disputes, such as MacArthur’s, only hampers mutual development. Also, cf. the 1999 joint declaration on justification of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation. “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” The Holy See, 1999, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html.

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361 Louth, Discerning The Mystery, 93.
CHAPTER SIX
READING SCRIPTURE IN LIGHT OF ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Introduction

In the face of what appears an insurmountable summit, this dissertation attempts to go further towards renewing evangelicalism than is found in other recent expeditions. However, it can only hope to make a couple of steps in the right direction. Although this chapter begins with a negative tone, it will attempt to generate positive movement by applying effective contours of a post-critical assessment to evangelical hermeneutics. From there, it will consider unavoidable ecclesiastical implications drawn from characteristics of Christian revelation. It will end with practical suggestions for evangelicals to engage the contemporary Catholic Church in biblical exegesis. In order to readjust evangelical reading of Scripture, one must return the Bible to its original context within Christian Tradition. Such an effort will broaden evangelical thinking and actually confirm some key evangelical convictions.

Realistic Impossibility

Despite the need for formal ecclesiology in the practice of evangelical exegesis, this dissertation negatively concludes that it is not possible to fully articulate a theological hermeneutic for evangelicals that adequately incorporates ecclesiology. Nor is it possible, in this present day, to develop a hermeneutic which extensively participates
with the Catholic Church. Both are needed but highly unlikely. The historic and theological separations between evangelicals and the Catholic Church are too severe.

One of the reasons for this dilemma is that evangelicalism is organized around ideological agreement, with no necessary historic reality or ecclesiastical structure.¹ As a result of centuries of fragmentation, it is not formally possible for a single evangelical voice to speak for the entire movement. Another reason is perceived irreconcilable differences between Catholics and evangelicals. Differences between theological declarations of the Catholic Church and entrenched positions of evangelicals appear to be currently irresoluble.² Although this dissertation is focused on changes that need to occur within evangelicalism, it does not deny that change needs to occur within the Catholic Church in order for a greater unity to be realized.³ Modern evangelicals may not agree with Luther’s claim that “today, the Roman pontiff” is the “fount and source of all

¹ For example, the National Association of Evangelicals is comprised of “more than 45,000 local Churches from 40 different denominations.” It is a large organization of millions of people, self-identified as those “who take the Bible seriously and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord” (www.nae.net).

² As mentioned in the previous chapter, some of these contentions include the Catholic concept of perpetual indefectibility of the Catholic Church and papal infallibility, and certain Marian dogmas. Some non-Catholics, including Eastern Orthodox and some Anglicans, hold to the doctrine of an indefectible Church within apostolic succession. However, their understandings of indefectibility are distinct from Roman Catholic views. Some hold that at least one branch of apostolic Christianity will remain true to the gospel at all times; however, they argue that it is erroneous to claim that a single branch and its bishop are perpetually indefectible. Others, including evangelicals, hold to more of an eschatological indefectibility. In other words, the Church may go through epochs of error, but eventually it will be “holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:27) by the power of Christ. In addition, the supreme juridical authority of the Church at Rome would not be accepted by evangelicals, just as it is not by other Protestants and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. While many respect the Catholic Church’s jurisdiction over its own See in Rome, roughly half of the worldwide Christian Church is not Catholic and does not regard Rome’s authority properly extending to the universal Church. The point here is these are examples of what appear to be irreconcilable differences between the Catholic Church and evangelicals.

³ The pope is put forward as a symbol of Christian unity. Therefore, a heavy responsibility is on him to effect universal Christian unity. Recent Pontiffs have acknowledged this responsibility.
superstition;” however, most would agree with Luther that more than abuses need to be addressed. Most evangelicals think the Catholic “system” itself needs attention.5

Despite these apparently intractable variances, Christ’s prayer for his followers to be “perfectly one” still resonates.6 The Apostle’s command to “make every effort” toward unity and peace is still obligatory. Upward progress toward divine unity must be attempted by evangelicals if they think they have the Spirit and adhere to Scripture. They must attempt to integrate ecclesiology with hermeneutics; they need to reacquaint themselves with theological ways of knowing that have been sadly neglected. In addition, they must directly engage the contemporary Catholic Church during the process of biblical exegesis. Positive advances can occur, even if full unity is not presently a realistic possibility. By evangelicals’ own standards, interpreting Scripture accurately and effectively is imperative. Scripture remains a significant influence in world Christianity. Possibly more people are reading Scripture than ever before, and many desire that God might meaningfully speak to their moral and social situations through the Bible.7 The present moment requires a critical reassessment of hermeneutics.

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4 Luther, “The Pagan Servitude of the Church,” in Dillenberger, 309.

5 Luther, “The Pagan Servitude of the Church,” in Dillenberger, 310.

6 John 17:23. The verb τετελειωμένοι (having been ripened, matured, perfected) is a perfect passive; it speaks of a lasting work of God in his people. It gives hope that despite any present insurmountable gulf, unity will be finally realized by divine action.

7 Increased reading of Scripture is due to a number of factors, including population growth, literacy advancement, and translation of Scripture into multiple languages which previously had no Bible. However, some have suggested that a great hunger for God’s Word is increasingly evident in the modern world. Cf. Synod of Bishops, “The Word Of God In The Life And Mission Of The Church: Lineamenta,” The Holy See, 2007, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20070427_lineamenta-xii-assembly_en.html.

In answering the question, “Why a Synod on the Word of God?,” cf. Introduction, 2: “In an increasing number of ways, people today are displaying a great need to listen to God and speak with him. At present, Christians are eagerly seeking the Word of God as the source of life and as a means of
Applicable Contours

The previous chapter considered three positive contours of post-critical analyses: self-criticism, openness to new ways of knowing, and continuity. Prior to exploring positive characteristics of Christian revelation and practical engagement with the Catholic Church, this section will attempt to apply these contours in order to reassess evangelical hermeneutics.

Self-Criticism and Mistaken Understandings

Evangelical theologians need to critique their own dominant authoritative structures for understanding Scripture, and reassess how stable those constructions are without a rigorous ecclesiology. Although several hermeneutical models within evangelicalism are not formally ecclesial, most of their traditionally orthodox confessions are unconsciously reliant upon ecclesiology. While appreciating benefits of Protestant encountering the Lord in a personal manner.” In addition, cf. Introduction, 4. The Synod claimed that since the Second Vatican Council, “With regard to the Word of God, many positive things have clearly taken place in the People of God: for example, biblical renewal in the liturgy, theology and catechesis; the distribution and practice of the Bible by the biblical apostolate and efforts of communities and ecclesial movements; and the increased use of the instruments of today’s communication media.” Also, Chapter 1:14, “Today, the People of God are increasingly showing a hunger and thirst for the Word of God (cf. 8:11, 12).” Finally, chapter 1:15 calls it a “rare opportunity” that “many of the Church’s members, individually and in groups, are intensely studying the Word of God in the Bible.”

“Unconsciously” because much of the official “what we believe” sections of evangelical theology unknowingly draw upon ancient, formal ecclesiastical declarations. A widespread assumption within evangelicalism is that their doctrinal confessions are purely drawn from Scripture. However, much of their language is found in traditional formulations, some that preceded the Reformation. These symbols of faith certainly resonated with Scripture, but they were more than elucidations of biblical proof texts; they were the expressed consciousness of a living, hierarchical Church—and their key terms were not always found in the Scriptures. The use of homoousian at Nicea is an obvious example. Cf. Lewis Ayres, Nicea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth Century Trinitarian Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 218–220. Ayres argues that Basil appealed to the Church’s “liturgical practice and ‘unwritten’ Tradition” in order to articulate his pneumatology. Candidates for baptism received their confessional “phraseology” from Tradition. Ayres argues that Basil’s “appeal to Tradition” is related to his understanding of contemplation (θωρία) in the theologian. The contemplation of the Spirit in the theologian gives him the ability to read the depth of Mosaic Law beyond the literal ‘Jewish’ meaning apparent in the text. Some of the most important articulation of doctrines within Christianity, such as the Spirit’s divinity, “gradually unfolded in the Church,” but would not have been possible without “the inner dynamics of the
biblical scholarship and not withdrawing legitimate contentions with Catholicism, evangelical need to be aware of where they themselves have gone too far. Extreme Biblicism, heavily dependent on technical scholarship of a static text, risks forgetting the exegetical need for living Tradition. It risks over emphasizing the extrinsic quality of revelation, and neglecting the human subject who is prepared to receive the gospel. The recent communal effort to move away from extreme individualism and extrinsicism should be applauded, but it needs to admit how short it falls. One needs to inquire what “one Body and one Spirit” means when local groups can determine which biblical language to preserve, and which to toss. The idea held by some that the Church can be reduced to a purely invisible reality when Scripture calls it a Body, specifically the contemplation of God” in the Christian theologian. In Basil, a far different methodology is operative than the extrinsic, grammatical emphasis in Geisler.

Geisler lays out an “appropriate” evangelical “theological methodology” in nine sequential steps. In his scheme, inductive analysis of the text is the first step and practical theology is the final step. The first seven steps consist of highly individualistic analyses on the part of the exegete. It is not until the sixth step that the individual interpreter finally articulates a “fully orbed doctrine.” It is not until the eighth step that he leaves his private study to gain a “view of orthodox teachings of the Church Fathers.” However, the consideration of Church Fathers is primarily extrinsic and intellectual. Does the modern evangelical come to the same doctrinal “understanding” as did his forbears? Do their conclusions match? Geisler’s long-awaited eighth point says nothing beyond an extrinsic comparison of notes. No guiding Spirit of truth operating in Christ’s body throughout time is mentioned. No communal engagement with the Spirit of the text is referenced. Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology: In One Volume* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2011), 159–164.

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9 Again, this paper is not focused on Catholic-Protestant polemics. However, examples of ongoing debates include papal infallibility and related Catholic understanding of the indefectibility of the Church, Eucharistic Presence, and the Assumption of Mary. It needs to be noted that Protestants themselves do not always agree on these issues.

10 *Paradosis*. Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6. Certainly, false Tradition can make Scripture impotent (Matthew 15:13; Mark 7:13); however, the danger of false Tradition hardly eliminates the need for genuine apostolic Tradition.

11 Ephesians 4:4.

12 Colossians 1:18.
body of one who was seen, heard, and handled, needs to be challenged.\textsuperscript{13} Biblical passages which suggest that evil will not prevail over the Church,\textsuperscript{14} an enduring presence of Christ is in that Church,\textsuperscript{15} and an ever acting Spirit is visibly assembling all aspects of that Church\textsuperscript{16} need to be reexamined prior to concluding that the Catholic Church is apostate.\textsuperscript{17}

On one hand, evangelicals need to challenge the reasoning behind their prevalent hermeneutical assumptions. Do the ongoing assumptions square with the very text that is being interpreted? On the other hand, the quality of exegetical fruit needs examination. The critical conversation needs to honestly address fragmentation of Christian unity. How have operative assumptions in exegesis hampered unity, whether in Luther’s day or the modern era? In addition to perennial fractures of unity, evangelicals need to examine the historic relation between demystification of Church and demystification of the biblical text. Might some of the liberalism in biblical interpretation which evangelicals decry be their own fault?

In addition, evangelicalism needs to give an honest second look at the Catholic Church. Without dismissing their genuine disagreements with Catholic theology, evangelicals need to clear up several myths they have held about Catholic theology.

\textsuperscript{13} 1 John 1:1–3.
\textsuperscript{14} Matthew 16:18.
\textsuperscript{15} Matthew 28:20.
\textsuperscript{16} 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4.
\textsuperscript{17} Certainly, Catholics need to be self-critical of their own misplaced criticisms of Protestants. However, that is not the focus of this dissertation.
Otherwise, intelligent conversation will never be possible. Following are some of the more predominant misconceptions about Catholic theology.

One myth evangelicals often believe is that the Catholic Church thinks Tradition can trump Scripture. From a Catholic perspective, this misunderstands what is meant by Tradition. For the Catholic, Tradition and Scripture are not opposed; rather, they are both holy, forming “one sacred deposit of the Word of God.” Catholics point out that Church preexisted Scripture and Tradition. Christ entrusted the Church with the Bible and oral Traditions. Written and unwritten Tradition therefore flow from a single divine source, and cannot contradict each other.¹⁸ Evangelicals hold analogous convictions about the various books of the Bible; ultimately, the texts are distinct, but have a single divine source and cannot contradict one another. This confidence is ultimately based on God, and the Spirit’s ability to preserve his truth. For the Catholic, it is not possible to suggest Scripture can exist without Tradition. Scripture itself is a traditional interpretation of revelation. The New Testament texts were the apostles’ interpretation of the life and oral teachings of Jesus, and the Old Testament was seen through the lens provided by Jesus, a lens Jesus himself manufactured for them on the road to Emmaus. In fact, there would be no Scripture without Tradition. For the Catholic, the two voices of revelation are seen in their unity. The “soul of sacred theology” is the “study of the sacred page.”¹⁹ Considering Christ’s admonition of Tradition potentially nullifying Scripture,²⁰ evangelicals have

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¹⁸ Cf. DV, 10.

¹⁹ DV, 24.

²⁰ Mark 7:13.
reason for caution. However, they are incorrect when they claim Catholics think Tradition is superior to Scripture.

Another assumed myth is that the Catholic Church has superficial regard for the text of the Bible due to its high view of Tradition. Only *sola scriptura* Protestants, the argument goes, maintain the integrity of God’s word. Contrary to these suppositions, the evidence suggests the centrality of Scripture within Catholicism.

Protestant scholarly emphasis on the text of Scripture has immeasurably benefitted centuries of biblical studies. Further, evangelicals have stressed personal appropriation of sacred Scripture. However, evangelicals need to overcome the assumption that Scripture is secondary in Catholic life and devotion. Liturgical worship in a communal setting is as devout as a private reading of the Bible. For the Catholic, “Sacred Scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy.” This is because “it is from the Scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning.”

The simple fact is that the majority of words spoken at a Catholic Mass are taken directly from Scripture. For liturgical worship to achieve its purpose, a “warm and living love for Scripture” is required. Joseph Fitzmyer claimed that many individual Catholics since the Reformation made the Bible a “Protestant Book” and tended to “shy away” from it. This might be true for some Catholics, but overall it can be disputed by the fact that Catholic liturgy is replete with Scripture. Even if dissenting Catholic scholars disparage the reliability of the text of Scripture, the Church formally considers it “infallible.”

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21 Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 52.

22 Fitzmyer, *Interpretation of Scripture*, 1.

'Immunity from error' extends to all the text of the Bible;\textsuperscript{24} the systematic index to Peter Hünemann’s 43rd edition of the Denzinger’s \textit{Enchiridion} repeatedly employs the word ‘inerrancy,’\textsuperscript{25} reflecting the language of the underlying documents describing the Catholic view of Scripture. The Second Vatican Council argues that the written text is ‘without error’ with respect to the truths it conveys pertaining to ‘our salvation.’\textsuperscript{26} These recent declarations of the Catholic Church are presented as consistent with its historic statements.\textsuperscript{27}

Another myth which needs to be dispelled is that the Catholic Church thinks it has the authority to create new dogmas. Part of this misunderstanding is related to miscomprehending the Catholic view of Tradition. Church Tradition, for the Catholic, is sourced in Christ himself; Tradition was ‘once for all delivered’\textsuperscript{28} to the Church.\textsuperscript{29} Deeper understandings and elucidations of the Tradition may develop, but those do not

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Pius XII, \textit{Humani generis}, 22.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Denzinger and Hünermann, ‘Sacred Scripture,’ A3bb, 1194.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} DV, 3:11, Denzinger, 4215: 923. Although several evangelicals contend that the text of Scripture is without error in all items it addresses, not just those pertaining to salvation, the goal here is to dispel the myth that Catholics have flippant regard for the text of Scripture and primarily cling to Tradition apart from the Bible. Also, evangelicals themselves do not agree on the extent and meaning of inerrancy.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Several of the quotations just mentioned are from Vatican II. However, this does not need to suggest a new and innovative Catholicism was invented in the 1960s. Benedict XVI, in 2005, cautioned against a ‘hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture,’ resulting from ‘compromises’ which misrepresent the ‘true spirit of the Council.’ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI To The Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings,” The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html.
    It is striking to this author how many contemporary Catholics who emphasize discontinuity at Vatican II almost appear to desire to become Protestant. They have possibly underestimated continuity as one of the essential aspects of Catholicism. Cf. Hauerwas, \textit{Community of Character}, 95. Here, Hauerwas blames Catholics for trying to be Protestants. In doing so, they have failed in their witness to make Protestants desire to be like Catholics.
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Jude 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Cf. DV, 2, 7–10.
\end{itemize}
constitute new creations. Vatican I was very clear that the pope does not have authority to “make known some new doctrine.” Catholic documents often reference 2 Timothy 1:13–14, where the epistle emphasizes retaining and “guarding” the deposit of faith. For the Catholic, the gospel is a person, Jesus Christ, who predates a scripted New Testament. The Catholic Church considers itself as securing, not inventing, that gospel. Evangelicals may argue that some doctrines were indeed invented by Rome, but they are incorrect to accuse the Catholic Church of claiming such prerogative.

A popular myth among evangelicals is that papal infallibility was arbitrarily designed purely for political reasons. Although evangelicals may disagree with the doctrine, they need to understand its source. The Catholic understands papal infallibility as rooted in the indefectibility of the Church, which is sourced in confidence in the Spirit, who is promised in Scripture. Papal infallibility is only understood by the Catholic in the context of a living Church established and guided by Christ. God dwells in the visible Church, making it “faithful” and “anointed,” the “pillar and buttress of the truth.” For the Catholic, the Church is “indestructible” due to God’s power and Christ’s promise. Owing to the presence of Christ, not human will, the “entire body” “cannot err in matters

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31 LG, 25.
32 Also Cf. LG, 25 and CCC, 857.
33 LG, 12.
34 1 Timothy 3:15.
35 CCC, 869.
36 Matthew 16:18.
of belief.”

For the Catholic, infallible teaching is limited. The pope can only speak infallibly on issues of faith and morals; his infallibility does not extend to issues of discipline, which might include his selection of bishops or cardinals, or judicial proceedings. The Catholic Church places clear limits on the pope. When speaking ex cathedra, he cannot “disclose a new doctrine.” He can only elucidate teaching that has been present in the Church since the time of Christ, and only on matters pertaining to faith and morals.

It’s important for evangelicals to try to understand the importance of a visible Church in Catholic thinking. For Catholics, the “visible assembly” and “spiritual community” are not “two realities.” Instead, they “form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and human element.”

The doctrine of papal infallibility is based on this presence of Christ in the Church. The authority of human leadership within the

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37 LG, 12.

38 Vatican I, Pastor aeternus, 4; Denzinger, 3070:615; 3074:616; and “The Charism of Infallibility,” 3dd, (The Infallibility of the Pope), 1294.


41 LG, 8.
“apostolic” ROCK Church is not arbitrary. The apostles, who are the “lasting foundation” of God’s kingdom, ordained their replacements; the modern bishops, as successors, are in the place of the apostles. The contemporary bishops are “endowed with the authority of Christ” to teach “the faith” and to illustrate it “by the light of the Holy Spirit.” Their placement in ministry is ordained by the Spirit, and their ministry will be exercised without interruption throughout time.

Certainly, evangelicals, as this author, can challenge the merits of deducing the full doctrine of papal infallibility from particular promises of Christ, but it appears incorrect to accuse the Catholic Church of arbitrariness. The doctrine developed within the broader implications over the indefectibility of the Church. Evangelicals might reasonably argue, as this author does, against a perpetually indefectible Church replete with continual inerrant teaching. And, they may argue with this author against the validity of claiming that such authority should be given to the singular office of the Bishop of Rome. Even evangelicals who see the doctrine as a logical possibility may judiciously argue that it is not a logical necessity. Regardless, those who debate need to realize that the doctrine was articulated from an ongoing pastoral concern to guard the apostolic faith once given. It was not arbitrarily legislated.

42 Quoted in LG, 8 as a reference to the Nicene Creed.
43 CCC, 869.
45 LG, 25.
46 CCC, 862.
Openness to Ecclesial Ways of Knowing

Evangelicals need to give the Catholic Church a second look accompanied with openness to ecclesial ways of theological knowing. In short, they need to get beyond their critique, some of which evangelicals consider valid, and revisit ecclesiology in general and the Catholic Church specifically as valid sources of theological knowledge. Most evangelicals appear closed to considering this option. Nearly all evangelical hermeneutical models provide benefits, but they are ultimately incomplete without formal ecclesiology and appreciation for catholicity.

Evangelicals are not called by this reader to dismantle their legitimate concerns regarding ecclesiological abuse. Nor are they expected to overlook legitimate differences they have with Catholic theology. However, they are invited to reconsider what they have excessively critiqued, and critique what they have naively assumed. Much of this is attitudinal; evangelicals must nurture willingness within themselves. However, it also involves literary review of prevalent Christian thought patterns prior to the Reformation. Evangelicals need to understand responsibly the axiomatic relationship between ecclesiology and Scripture. They are asked to reexamine their hermeneutical models, and consider churchly ways of gaining theological insight. Possibly, a cure for some of their ills can be discovered in the symbols they rejected so long ago. A second naiveté appears to be in order.

The call to reconsider the role of ecclesiology in exegesis of Scripture is in fact not new. It is as old as Christianity. “He cannot possess the garment of Christ who parts
and divides the Church of Christ.”47 Were the Christian Scriptures ever understood without a living Church? Can a spiritual interpretation of Scripture, what Steinmetz called the “medieval theory of levels of meaning in the biblical text,”48 occur without a living rule of faith? Further, if “God is still speaking,”49 then might the Catholic Church have something to say? Evangelicals express openness to listening to God’s voice in various modes; however, they frequently close their minds to formal ecclesiastical options. Evangelicals need to open themselves to the pastoral voices of ecclesiology and the relevance of the Catholic Church in biblical exegesis. Many simply appear unwilling to hearken to the ecclesial manger where Christ’s voice was first heard.50

Continuity and the Petrine Ministry

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, no clear path for Catholic and evangelical reconciliation is apparent. The purpose of this dissertation is only to mark out a few next steps. However, evangelicals can certainly help the process by attempting to understand the Petrine ministry and apostolic succession with “sympathy.”

47 Cyprian, On the Unity of the Church (ANF 5:7:423).


Continuity is indispensable for a religion that claims descent from apostolic faith, especially if that faith is based on God acting in history. This means that evangelicals must equally draw on theologians who preceded the Reformation and are outside their own evangelical circles if they wish to claim confidence in the “one Spirit” who guides the “one body.” It is essential for evangelicals to dialogue with other denominations and across generations. Most evangelical theologies correctly see the importance of continuity in Christian faith; many confidently claim it for themselves. Germaine to this dissertation, the setting for biblical reading and theological development must continuously be in the formal company of God’s people. In regards to the Catholic Church, it means that evangelicals must deal with the Petrine ministry. While engaging the idea of Petrine ministry, the evangelical should start with two considerations.

First, some sort of hierarchy is needed for every living organism. The biological world is replete with living hierarchy, which demonstrates God’s design for healthy life. The communal nature of Christian faith has always assumed a communal hermeneutic, and Christian communities have always had some form of teaching authority. There is no apparent justification to discard those assumptions. Individual believers, especially leaders, were expected to “stand firm and hold” to the “traditions you were taught,” “either by our spoken word or by our letter.” The apostles’ teaching was part of the

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51 Ephesians 4:4–5.


53 There have been multiple forms of teaching authority used throughout Christian history, even among those who disdain all external, human forms of authority. Even those who claim to only “follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:12) nonetheless set themselves up as authoritative oracles. Who, then, determines what following Christ looks like? Who determines the interpretation of the Bible, or what the Spirit says?

54 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:2.
believers’ devotional practice in Jerusalem, and adherence to certain written and unwritten “traditions” was the basis of fellowship in Thessalonica. The first missionaries were formally sent by a pneumatically inspired “Church.” As their work spread, the correctness of their efforts was judged by the hierarchy established by Christ. These practices were consistent with Christ’s promise to be “with you (all) always” and “guide you (all) into all truth” by the Spirit. Jesus claimed that he would ever be present with his people, specifically invoking the idea that Hell would not prevail against the Church as it engaged in its activity of authoritative “teaching.” This challenges the notion of discontinuity between generations, and the need for a revolution which discards hierarchy. In a tone reminiscent of Matthew, the first letter to Timothy links the modern day teaching of the Church with the original testimony of Jesus, and

55 Acts 2:42.
56 2 Thessalonians 3:6.
60 John 16:13. μας, “you all;” second person plural, accusative. Grammatically, the plural “you” in Matthew and John (previous footnote) could possibly refer to each individual; i.e., “I will be with each of you,” or, “The Spirit will guide each of you into all truth.” However, the context helps furnish the most accurate translation. Christ is speaking to his disciples gathered together, those for whom he insisted on and prayed for unity. It appears the best translation is to understand the plural “you” as referencing a single body. Christ promised to be with his followers as a whole, and the Spirit would guide the whole Church. Certainly, he is present with each individual and the Spirit guides individuals; however, the emphasis in these passages appears to be on Christ’s blessings on the company of his followers. A single group of disciples appears to be his focus.
62 Matthew 16:18.
63 Matthew 28:20.
with the final appearing of the “Sovereign.” 64 In an image of unbroken testimony, Christ first declared the gospel, and he will ultimately preserve the faith in his Church until the end of the age. 65 How does Christ preserve his word over time? It is through ordained leadership; they are the ones who safeguard the “deposit entrusted” 66 in the interim. Certainly, an apparent large-scale apostasy will come at the hands of “some,” 67 but they are not identified. Further, apostasy will not be universal. Yet, it is the official ministers who are depended upon to “keep the commandment unstained” 68 in the face of apostasy. Even the Protestant reader, who thinks the highest ordained teachers of the Church can err, can see in this passage that the correction of error still comes from authoritative ordained leadership. 69 Confidence in Christ must translate to some confidence in hierarchy because Christ is the one who pneumatically ordains his leaders. This author does not suggest Matthew’s Church or Timothy’s guardians are necessarily promised infallibility. Apostate teaching will occur, and these passages do not say it cannot occur at the highest levels of the hierarchy. However, none of these passages advocate dismissal of the paradigm of authoritative ordained leadership. While these sacred passages do not explicitly delineate how modern ecclesiastical structures must be tangibly related to

64 1 Timothy 6:13–15.
65 1 Timothy 6:20.
66 1 Timothy 6:20.
67 1 Timothy 4:1.
68 1 Timothy 6:14.
69 Catholics do think individual bishops, priests, and others can err. However, the ratification of a council by Peter’s successor is what provides guardianship to the deposit of faith. Despite this biblical text, all evangelicals do not think ordained clergy is necessarily the remedy for error in the Church. However, this disagreement only further demonstrates the lack of unity within Protestantism.
historic Christianity, they do suggest an important degree of continuity. Errant teaching is ultimately corrected by authority within an ecclesiastical structure. Any responsible evangelical hermeneutic must be shaped with this assumption.

Second, as already illustrated in this dissertation, the general idea of apostolic succession has biblical roots. The doctrine contains an essential ingredient often missing in evangelical theology: continuity. After the apostles died, the early Christians certainly saw its value. Clement, shortly after the late first century, communicated the importance of apostolic succession of real persons,70 and Irenaeus relied on it for his second-century apologetics.71 Further, the teaching of apostolic succession is important currently for more than the Catholic Church. Both the Orthodox Churches and the Anglican Communion maintain distinct, but positive, understandings of apostolic succession. The fact is that evangelical and Reformed theologians who deny any sort of ministerial apostolic succession, or limit it to right thinking, are in a minority. The contemporary Catholic Church is only being consistent with itself in affirming the need for succession.72 While several evangelicals unfortunately care little about the doctrine, they need to reconsider it from a posture of critical empathy. Evangelicals will surely disagree

70 Cf. Clement of Alexandria, epistula Clementis ad Corinthios, in The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians,(ANF, 9:42:241–242). “Real persons” is inserted here because many Protestants have restricted apostolic succession to simply believing what the apostles taught. However, this view does not seem to be what early Fathers had in mind. To this reader, the view of successive right thinking almost appears to be docetic, and leads to anarchy. It evidences a loss of understanding Christian sacramentality. Ultimately, it neglects implications of the Incarnation. The idea of Christ being present in the Church means he is present in the people, not just their ideas.

71 Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Chapter 3 (ANF, 1:3; 415–416). Of course, that is this reader’s interpretation of the Fathers because it appears to be the most credible interpretation of the patristic texts in question. Others may disagree.

72 DV, 7.
with details of different elucidations of apostolic succession, especially the Catholic teaching; but, they need to understand the essential importance of some form of apostolic succession in transmitting the gospel. Apostolic succession involves more than ordaining clergy or providing doctrinal assent; it is the living means by which the gospel will continue in the earth until Christ returns. Through apostolic succession, Catholics give themselves better opportunity to read Scripture in continuity and historical connection with the apostles, even if the particular Catholic theory contains errors. Apostolic succession gives Catholics a better opportunity to read Scripture in its fullness. To this author, evangelicals should affirm the sovereign and providential work of Christ in the Catholic Church without assenting to all the particulars of Catholic dogma. While evangelicals do not hold to infallibility or the exclusivity of the Catholic apostolic line, they need to apprehend the value of historic connection to the apostles and Christ. Through apostolic succession, the Catholic Church provides the evangelical with tangible, historical connection to the apostles. The doctrine of apostolic succession is another example of the need for evangelicals to give higher regard for the continuous work of the one Holy Spirit in the universal Church. Without this regard, Christian theology will be spineless, or slip into some form of Docetism.

Due to the importance of continuity in Christian theology, evangelicals should seek to exercise critical empathy for the Petrine ministry. Otherwise they will not be sufficiently engaging the Catholic Church. As mentioned previously, evangelicals should

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74 Cf. Braaten and Jensen, Catholicity of the Reformation, 62; and Braaten, Mother Church, 5, 34.
first be clear regarding what the Catholic Church claims for the pope, and what it does not claim. Evangelicals need to seek to avoid distorted accounts of Catholic teaching.

On one hand, the Catholic Church reasonably argues from Scripture that Christ made Peter the clear leader of the early Church, and that a degree of deference to Peter’s successors is evident in some of the earliest Christian literature. Further, the Catholic Church appears to accurately portray the perceived significance of apostolic succession throughout Church history; bishops, following the apostles, were entrusted to guard the deposit of faith. These premises are evident in the New Testament and throughout Christian history, even if they do not warrant later Catholic developments regarding the Petrine ministry. On the other hand, most evangelicals would argue that Catholic theology unjustifiably expands the meaning of select biblical texts.75 Evangelicals often point to the extent of authority which Catholics give to the Petrine ministry as an example. To this author, the sacred passages which speak of Peter’s primacy neither appear to guarantee Petrine infallibility at all times on matters of faith and morals, nor suggest that a Christian congregation should not be called a real “church” if it does not enjoy communion with the pope as one of its “internal constitutive principles.”76 Instead, Peter is often presented in Scripture as an elder brother who is fallible in all points, and

75 Of course, some evangelicals make the same claim against their evangelical opponents on various other topics.


perennially needs correction and restoration. Nonetheless, these critiques do not give warrant for evangelicals to jettison the Catholic hierarchy. Nor do they justify a postmodern ontological preference for particularities, coupled with contempt for universals, as seen in some communal hermeneutics, as well as more extreme feminist and liberation theologies. To this author, evangelicals should be more reasonable in their critique of Catholic ecclesiology. Evangelicals are not bound by the teachings of the Magisterium, but they need to listen to them as they would an elder brother. They can maintain their criticisms of the Catholic Church’s doctrine of the Petrine ministry, and still respect the pope as one of the Spirit’s divine appointees. Such respect is first attitudinal. Without advocating infallibility, evangelicals need to trust that the Lord Who promised to never leave His Church may indeed speak through the pope and bishops. Otherwise, they have neglected the Bible’s clear teaching that the Trinity organizes the Church and operates within it. However, respect also involves critical listening and research. Minimally, the evangelical theologian should be familiar with the Magisterium’s most prominent teachings, and relevant papal encyclicals. Although this effort to respect without necessary submission will not satisfy many, it certainly challenges evangelicals to reconsider their own stubborn premises. Possibly, that is the first necessary step. Evangelicals need to interpret Scripture in continuity by affirming the convictions that Christian history is not arbitrary, and ecclesial structures of authority, even when understood incorrectly, are gifts from God.

77 1 Corinthians 12:1–3.
Summary

Evangelicals need to re-examine their own criticisms critically. This will help them understand obligatory contours their own hermeneutics must exhibit. It will help them detect distorted, mythical assumptions about Catholic theology. It will open them to retrieving forgotten but necessary exegetical assumptions. Evangelicals must honestly attempt empathy from a critical distance. They can neither dismiss their historic criticisms levied against Roman Catholicism, nor forget the real dangers of ecclesiastical abuse, whether Catholic or Protestant. However, they need to advance beyond the criticism and readdress the foundational relationship between Church and Scripture. With faith in the Spirit, they need to attempt to emerge on the other side of criticism, and help themselves by rediscovering living value still resident in those structures they thought were condemned.

Ecclesial Characteristics of Revelation

Ecclesial exegesis of Scripture appears to be compulsory when one examines certain characteristics of Christian revelation. The context in which Christian revelation arrives, its central focus, its soteriological effect, and its paradoxical quality all suggest the need to read the Bible in living ecclesiastical Tradition.

The following analyses of particular characteristics of Christian revelation will heavily draw on the text of Scripture, partly because it is speaking from an evangelical location to an evangelical audience. However, it will also significantly utilize recent Catholic theologians and formal documents. The object is to demonstrate the necessity of interpreting the Scriptures, as an evangelical, with assistance from the Catholic Church in a way that fruitfully broadens an understanding of the sacred text. Evangelicals should
discover numerous formal Catholic statements that are congruent and edifying to evangelical faith.

Ecclesial Setting of Revelation

Evangelicals generally confess belief in the inspiration of the biblical text. However, they cannot neglect the ecclesial matrix in which the Spirit produced the text. Jesus left a Church, not a scripted word, at his departure. The New Testament was produced after Christ’s life on earth by those to whom the word was “once for all delivered.”

The Spirit was promised after Christ’s departure to “guide” Christ’s followers “into all the truth.” This promise is commonly understood as preauthorization for the writings of the New Testament. However, it is a mistake to forget the inspired womb that birthed the sacred text. The Church, as the cradle of the New Testament, was the necessary recipient of revelation, and was later considered the proper pneumatic location of biblical interpretation. From the earliest records, the work of the gospel, including interpretation of the Scriptures, involved human leadership presumed to be explicitly endorsed. Christ progressively develops his “whole body” through distinct persons to whom he enabled to do the work of ministry. The New Testament itself is an ecclesial theology. The four Gospels are not simply unbiased, objective reports of historic events. Instead, the faith-filled authors had distinct motives for why they included

78 Jude 3.
80 Ephesians 4:16.
82 Benedict XVI, God’s Word, 62–63.
what they wrote, and why they positioned it differently from each other in their respective texts.\textsuperscript{83} This observation does not need to challenge the historicity or inspiration of the Gospels. Rather, it is put forward to demonstrate that the New Testament itself was written to already existing Churches with a measure of doctrine already in place.

In the New Testament, the term “Church” is often used to reference a particular congregation,\textsuperscript{84} or the plural “churches” is used when referencing distinct congregations.\textsuperscript{85} However, a single universal “body” remains in the background of these uses. Christ’s use of the singular,\textsuperscript{86} the recurring cry for unity throughout the New Testament, Paul’s insistence on “one body,”\textsuperscript{87} the gathering of a council,\textsuperscript{88} and the monogamous bride imagery\textsuperscript{89} all suggests that the ideal was a universal Church in which each particular congregation had its identity.\textsuperscript{90} “You are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”\textsuperscript{91} Given the ecclesiastical context of the authoring of the

\textsuperscript{83} Cf. Matthew’s “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (5:3) with Luke’s “Blessed are you who are poor” (6:20), or Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount neatly contained in chapters 5–7 and Luke’s parallel spreading out of Christ’s teaching throughout his Gospel, interspersing the teachings with other various narratives. The Evangelists clearly appear to have had motives behind the construction of their narratives.

\textsuperscript{84} e.g., Philemon 1:2.

\textsuperscript{85} e.g., Acts 15:41.

\textsuperscript{86} Matthew 16:18.

\textsuperscript{87} Ephesians 4:4.

\textsuperscript{88} Acts 15.


\textsuperscript{90} Cf. Paul’s advocacy for the suffering “saints” in Jerusalem in 1 Corinthians 16:1–4. Paul “ directed” Churches he personally started in Galatia and Corinth to financially support the Church in Jerusalem, which he did not start. An assumed unity is operative in the background.

\textsuperscript{91} 1 Corinthians 12:27.
New Testament and the later ecclesial validation of canonical texts, it is consistent to argue that hermeneutics was ideally formed by a community aware of the “universal dimension” of Christian faith.⁹²

As mentioned, John Nevin saw this when he argued that the Bible needed to be interpreted within the “orbit of the creed,” from within the communion of the Church. “The Bible, to be a true word of Christ, must be ruled by the life of the Church.”⁹³ For Nevin, the Apostles’ Creed was a “common rule of faith, or canon of truth, which the Universal Church held from the beginning.”⁹⁴ Its universal acceptance showed it to be a symbol of the comprehensive faith of Christ’s followers. Benedict XVI observed that the “practice of the Church, and of medieval theology which followed it” demonstrated that the “creed” served as the “hermeneutic key to the Scriptures.”⁹⁵ Although Nevin and Benedict XVI obviously have different understandings of Tradition and the formal role of creeds, and may differ further from contemporary evangelicals, they both recognize that an ecclesiastically-generated hermeneutic was needed to convey a unified Scripture. The Church served as the indispensable setting for biblical interpretation.

⁹² Cf. Benedict XVI’s statements to the Bishops in Switzerland: “On the other hand, they (the Bishops) must open the local Churches to the universal dimension. Given the difficulties the Orthodox encounter with the Autocephalous Churches as well as the problems of our Protestant friends in the face of the disintegration of the regional Churches, we realize the great significance of universality and the importance of the Church being open to totality, to become in universality a Church which is truly one.” (Benedict XVI, “Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Switzerland, Tuesday, 7 November 2006,” The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20061107_swiss-bishops.html.)


⁹⁴ Nevin, “New Liturgy,” 34.

⁹⁵ Benedict XVI, God’s Word, 61.
For evangelicals, the contemporary upshot of this is that the Scriptures should be “read within the living community of the Church”\(^96\) which produced them. The Scripture is the supreme rule of faith, and it “cannot be broken.”\(^97\) However, neither should it be read in a vacuum; evangelicals must attempt to read the Bible with Catholics in the full pneumatic life-flow in which it was generated. This involves a regard for the symbiotic relationship between Scripture, Tradition, and the modern, living Church. Again, this dissertation can point to the goal but is incapable of mapping the journey. Apparent irreconcilable differences exist between evangelicals and other Christians, especially the Catholic Church, which makes it impossible to satisfactorily identify a universal governing body of interpreters. Nonetheless, evangelicals must make their move; they must give greater effort to reading Holy Scripture within divinely-given environs. They must intentionally engage visible, ecclesiastical bodies, including the Catholic Church. Otherwise, they will potentially disrespect the Spirit who inspired the text and risk dishonoring the Lord’s body.\(^98\)

**Christocentric Focus of Revelation**

Christology in some form was the explicit approach behind various exegetical methods\(^99\) throughout Church history and in the New Testament.\(^100\) It is put forward in  

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\(^96\) Benedict XVI, *Bishops of Switzerland.*  
\(^97\) John 10:35.  
\(^98\) Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:27–28. Although this passage is in a different context, the general warning applies.  
\(^100\) As mentioned, Matthew 2:15’s use of Hosea 11:1, as well as multiple other New Testament passages, are dependent upon the Christ event for their interpretations of Old Testament passages. Inductive or communal exegetical methods would not be able to achieve similar conclusions.
the present work as the necessary overarching guide for Christian hermeneutics which can successfully function with diverse exegetical models. However, it is also argued that a Christocentric interpretation of Scripture implies an ecclesiastical warrant.

From the earliest known perspectives of Christians, the conviction that Jesus is the center of Scripture seems prevalent.\footnote{John 5:39.} The harmony of revelation was sourced in the person of Christ, pointed to him, and was fulfilled in him.\footnote{Matthew 5:17.} After Jesus announced, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand,”\footnote{Mark 1:15.} it began to become evident that more than the fulfillment of a prophecy was occurring; the prophecy itself had stepped forward.\footnote{Cf. John 5:39.} “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world;”\footnote{1 Peter 1:20.} his origins were traced to “ancient days;”\footnote{Micah 5:2.} he preceded Abraham;\footnote{John 8:58.} he “followed” the children the Israel through the wilderness;\footnote{1 Corinthians 10:1–5.} he spoke “in” the prophets;\footnote{1 Peter 1:11.} he was the living temple of God;\footnote{John 2:18–22.} he provided unity to the universe;\footnote{Colossians 1:17.} he was the source of everything and the final

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{John 5:39.}
\item \footnote{Matthew 5:17.}
\item \footnote{Mark 1:15.}
\item \footnote{Cf. John 5:39.}
\item \footnote{1 Peter 1:20.}
\item \footnote{Micah 5:2.}
\item \footnote{John 8:58.}
\item \footnote{1 Corinthians 10:1–5.}
\item \footnote{1 Peter 1:11.}
\item \footnote{John 2:18–22.}
\item \footnote{Colossians 1:17.}
\end{itemize}
destination of it all.\textsuperscript{112} He was sent to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,”\textsuperscript{113} but also came as “a light for revelation”\textsuperscript{114} to all humanity. Just as “he stood up to read,”\textsuperscript{115} so the text needs the one who “fulfilled”\textsuperscript{116} it to rise before it is understood. Only in the light of his paschal mystery and resurrection can the Old Testament “Scripture” and New Testament “word that Jesus had spoken” be clearly grasped.\textsuperscript{117} It was after he “interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself”\textsuperscript{118} that it all began to become clear. It was when he “opened” their eyes that “they recognized him,”\textsuperscript{119} and their “minds” could “understand the Scriptures.”\textsuperscript{120} Philip expressed the human desire to see God, and Jesus pointed to himself.\textsuperscript{121} “In the days of his flesh”\textsuperscript{122} Jesus revealed God to the world. “No one ever spoke like this man,”\textsuperscript{123} and “never since the world began”\textsuperscript{124} did anyone do what he did. God fully dwelled in him.\textsuperscript{125} Attempts to gain the life of the

\textsuperscript{112} Colossians 1:16–22.

\textsuperscript{113} Matthew 15:24.


\textsuperscript{115} Luke 4:16.


\textsuperscript{117} John 2:22.

\textsuperscript{118} Luke 24:27.


\textsuperscript{120} Luke 24:45.

\textsuperscript{121} John 14:8–9.

\textsuperscript{122} Hebrews 5:7.

\textsuperscript{123} John 7:46.

\textsuperscript{124} John 9:32.

\textsuperscript{125} Colossians 2:9.
Kingdom without going through Christ could be likened to someone attempting to enter a feast without complying with the conditions of the invitation,\textsuperscript{126} attempting to enter a building without a “door,”\textsuperscript{127} or trying to open a door without “the key.”\textsuperscript{128}

The ancient presumption of Christological unity in the Scriptures is significant for evangelicals who hope to interpret the Scriptures in continuity with their progenitors. On one hand, a Christocentric vision claims to be a “theological fact”\textsuperscript{129} which suggests a “criterion” for judging the “truthfulness” of any theological dogma; it presumes all biblical interpretation must exhibit an “orientation to Christ himself.”\textsuperscript{130} The text of the Bible is more than \textit{gramma}; it is also \textit{pneuma}. Grammatical analyses without Christocentric spiritual interpretation leads to fundamentalism and “kills.”\textsuperscript{131} In a Christocentric hermeneutic, the writings within this “one Scripture” can only be properly understood “if they are read in the \textit{analogia fidei} as a oneness in which there is progress towards Christ, and inversely, in which Christ draws all history to himself; and if, moreover, all this is brought to life in the Church’s faith.”\textsuperscript{132} “If it leads us away from

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{126} Matthew 22:1–14.
\item \textsuperscript{127} John 10:7–9.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Luke 11:52.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Benedict XVI, \textit{Bishops of Switzerland}.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Benedict XVI, \textit{Verbum Domini}, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{131} 2 Corinthians 3:6. Also cf. Benedict XVI, \textit{God’s Word}, 54.
\end{itemize}
him, then it certainly does not come from the Holy Spirit, who guides us more deeply into
the Gospel, and not away from it.”  
133 Considering that the Paschal mystery gives
Scripture its “deepest fulfillment,” and furnishes history with its “inner logic” and “true
meaning,” 134 then all biblical interpretation must be viewed in the light of Christ’s
Passion and resurrection. Otherwise, the proper unity of the text is being neglected.

On the other hand, the Scriptures must not be interpreted in a pneumatic vacuum.
Christocentric hermeneutics cannot be allowed to curtail other approaches to interpreting
the *gramma* of the biblical text. “A proper exegesis of the text” certainly “must be based
on the historical-critical method,” as well as “enriched by other approaches.” 135
Historical-grammatical analyses begin the process of investigating the objective literal
meaning of each separate passage. In addition, the dating of the particular manuscripts,
authorship, identities of original recipients, form analyses, and redaction histories are
critical elements of the initial exegetical process. Further, more subjective, communal
interpretations of the texts can furnish applicable insights which are not always
immediately detected in the texts. These might include some forms of reader-response
readings or an understanding of the real lived experiences of contemporary readers of the
sacred texts. However, without a governing Christocentric lens, all of these important
disciplines are incomplete and incapable of judging the full meaning of the Scriptures;
their particular emphases will prevent them from unifying and forming a full
understanding of the Scriptures, resulting in theology being reduced to either a restricted


134 Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 12.

scientific endeavor or yet another form of anthropology. It is only Christ himself who provides the interpretive spiritual sense and full-orbed meaning to the Bible. This governing Christocentric hermeneutic is not merely imaginative, nor should it be confused with private intellectual conjecture. Instead, the spiritual, or Christological, sense of Scripture is sourced in the literal text itself, the Paschal mystery, and the contemporary life in the Spirit of the Church.

Evangelicals should realize that Christocentric hermeneutics implies the biblical text is to be read in the authorized community of his people. If Christ is the focus of Scripture, then Scripture must be read in his presence; he must be the one who interprets the text. The “body of Christ” is his real presence on earth, and remains the center of all revelatory activity. Although the Church is assembled by the Spirit, it is not haphazardly referred to as Christ’s “body.” Here, the Chalcedonian Creed helps ecclesiology. The Church shares in the humanity of Christ as much as it does his divinity. “We come to the true conception of the Church through a true and sound Christology (as in the Creed), and in no other way.” Analogous to the Incarnation, the Church is understood as visible, structured, and the physical dwelling in which God lives; it is a

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136 Cf. Synod of Bishops, Instrumentum Laboris, 22b.
137 Cf. Synod of Bishops, Instrumentum Laboris, 22b.
138 1 Corinthians 11:27.
139 Colossians 1:24.
141 1 Timothy 3:15. ζῶντος.
divinely organized community where Jesus is actually encountered. By his Spirit, Christ is “in the midst” of his Churches, bringing the “good work” he began to “completion” by divinely working his salvation in them. He accomplishes this through real historical people, who both authored the sacred text and authoritatively interpret it.

Evangelicals need ecclesiology to conduct the symphonic unity Christ brings to revelation. Revelation, like a “hymn with many voices,” is “polyphonic.” And in Scripture, the “many heralds” of revelation are frequently called “word of God” in their particularity. Scripture itself instructs its reader to give an ear to nature in order to hear the word of God. In creation, the “knowledge” of God, including “his attributes” and “divine nature,” had been “shown” in a “plain” manner. Paul was merely restating long held assumptions. The deuterocanonical Book of Wisdom had earlier said that through

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143 Matthew 18:20; Matthew 28:20. Although the immediate context of Matthew 18 is discipline of members, the assumption that Christ is present with his people is not restricted to moments of discipline. Cf. the relationship between Hebrews 13:7 and 13:8. Christ is constant, as exemplified in “your leaders.”

144 Revelation 1:13.


146 Philippians 2:13.

147 Synod of Bishops, Instrumentum Laboris, 9.


149 Synod of Bishops, Instrumentum Laboris, 9.

150 Romans 1:19–20. The term translated “plain” Φανερόν (phaneron) emphasizes an outward obvious manifestation; it suggests physical evidence. Paul’s repeated use of the term (Φανερό) in Romans 2:28 is translated “outwardly.”
“the greatness and beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen.”

And the Psalmist said all the cosmos reverberates with “speech” that “reveals knowledge” about God and his “glory.” Within creation, it is humanity that best displays God; Paul argued that the knowledge of God’s law is in everyone’s conscience, even those without divinely written texts. The messages of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and various believers are all referred to as the word of God, and certainly the written text of Scripture is repeatedly called the word of God.

Christocentric hermeneutics brings these several words of God into unity by understanding them as “analogically” mediating a single voice; in reality, there is only one Word. There has always been a single source to the various manifestations of revelation: “God” “has spoken to us by his Son. Although God lately spoke through his

151 Wisdom 13:5.

152 Psalm 19:1–3.


154 Romans 2:15.

155 Acts 13:5.

156 The phrases “This is what the Lord says,” “The Lord spoke to Moses,” “The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel,” etc. appears up to two thousand times in the Old Testament.

157 2 Timothy 4:2, 5. Note Paul calling Timothy to do the work of an “evangelist” in verse 5.


159 Cf. Exodus 24:7; 34:27; Deuteronomy 31:9; 2 Kings 22:8; Nehemiah 8:1–3; Jeremiah 30:2; Luke 24:44; 2 Peter 3:14–16; Revelation 22:18–19. Many synonyms are used which obviously connect the word of God with the written text of Scripture; e.g., Law, Ordinances, testimonies, commandments, precepts, statutes. Cf. Psalm 119, where all but four verses of one hundred seventy six appear to refer to God’s word as written. Throughout the Old Testament statements which say something similar to, “And God said to Moses,” “And God spoke to the prophet, saying,” “Hear the Word of the LORD,” or the older translation, “Thus saith the Lord,” and similar, occur almost two thousand times.

160 Benedict XVI, Verbum Domini, 7.

161 Hebrews 1:1–2.
Son “in these last days,”¹⁶² he had always communicated through him, “through whom he created the world.”¹⁶³ The symphony has always been in harmony. The concord connecting various words of God is the “person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Father, made man.”¹⁶⁴ For, “the complete Word of God which was in the beginning with God is not a multitude of Words, for it is not words. It is a single word.”¹⁶⁵

The Spirit enables the Church to order harmoniously polyphonic revelation around Christ as its center. Ideally, exegetes immerse themselves in the word of God by fully participating in the body of Christ prior to interpreting the Scriptures. The Church’s fecund womb was the source of the New Testament and its contemporary gatherings remain the location of charismatic speech. Just as all ecstatic prophecies are to be judged in the Church,¹⁶⁶ so the Scripture is to be interpreted within her living Tradition. The analogy of faith¹⁶⁷ refers to the Church’s faith, not one’s private revelation or the narrative musings of a small group. “Christ is not dead,” but alive; “it is precisely in his Church” that he is found “living and present.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² Hebrews 1:2.
¹⁶³ Hebrews 1:3.
¹⁶⁴ Benedict XVI, Verbum Domini, 7.
¹⁶⁶ Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:26–33.
¹⁶⁷ Romans 12:6. κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως.
¹⁶⁸ Benedict XVI, God’s Word, 58. Evangelicals often express concern over identifying the Church with the Incarnate Christ. The fear is that the Church will replace Christ or become another deity, resulting in idolatry. Cf. George, “Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology,” in Catholics and Evangelicals, 127. However, the frequent evangelical concern against idolatry of the Church does not justify neglect of the sacramental presence of Christ in his people. Nor does it sanction a Gnostic-like spiritualization of Christianity, which supposes to be a religion based on God present in human flesh. The underestimation of the sacramental nature of the Church is as deadly as idolatry; both paths lead to distortion.
Soteriological Effect of Revelation

Revelation is a personal disclosure of God which consequently has a soteriological effect on its recipients. Considering that Christian salvation involves participation in the hypostatic union of Christ’s divine and human natures, it follows that interpretation of salvific revelation needs to occur in the divine-human ecclesial Body of Christ, which includes visible, historical structures which he established.

Christian revelation keeps a tight balance between conveying facts to be understood and a person to be encountered.\footnote{DV, 6} Notwithstanding its dogmatic element, Christian revelation transcends “propositional statements.”\footnote{ICBI 2:6.} The endgame has always been personal “knowledge of him.”\footnote{Ephesians 1:17.} “Revelation in the Bible is an encounter between God and people.”\footnote{Synod of Bishops, Instrumentum Laboris, 23.} “In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them.”\footnote{DV, 21} The reader of Scripture is informed about God, and then transformed by the engagement; God engages the recipient in discourse and “becomes known through the dialogue” he has “with us.”\footnote{Benedict XVI, Verbum Domini, 6.}

God’s “initiative” in revelation “is utterly gratuitous, moving from God to men and women in order to bring them to salvation.”\footnote{John Paul II, Fides et ratio, The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html.} God’s personal disclosure is a

\footnotetext[169]{DV, 6} \footnotetext[170]{ICBI 2:6.} \footnotetext[171]{Ephesians 1:17.} \footnotetext[172]{Synod of Bishops, Instrumentum Laboris, 23.} \footnotetext[173]{DV, 21} \footnotetext[174]{Benedict XVI, Verbum Domini, 6.} \footnotetext[175]{John Paul II, Fides et ratio, The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html.}
“dialogue”\textsuperscript{176} of love, and he is revealed face to face\textsuperscript{177} as “love”\textsuperscript{178} through Jesus Christ. The Lord speaks to his people as “friends,” those to whom he has “made known” all that he heard from the Father.\textsuperscript{179} Out of “love”\textsuperscript{180} Christ emptied himself in humility with the intention to serve others.\textsuperscript{181} Christ loved before it was mutual.\textsuperscript{182} He chose his followers; they did not select him.\textsuperscript{183} However, the “novelty” of the transforming “dialogue”\textsuperscript{184} does not preclude free will. The revealing God causes a “radical transformation” within those who are “sincerely open.”\textsuperscript{185} In faith, people become united to the God who “loved”\textsuperscript{186} them.

Christian salvation involves participation in the God who personally reveals himself. It is more than changing one’s mind, or providing doctrinal assent. Christian faith and confession\textsuperscript{187} involves “actual participation” in Christ’s real “life and power.”\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{176} Benedict XVI, \textit{Verbum Domini}, 6.
\textsuperscript{177} 2 Corinthians 4:6.
\textsuperscript{178} 1 John 4:8,16.
\textsuperscript{180} Philippians 2:2.
\textsuperscript{181} Philippians 2: 7: Άλλά έαυτòν ἐκένωσεν: But he emptied himself / made himself nothing (kenosis); μορφήν δούλου λαβών: taking the form of a servant.
\textsuperscript{182} Cf. 1 John 4:10 and Romans 5:8.
\textsuperscript{183} John 15:16.
\textsuperscript{184} Benedict XVI, \textit{Verbum Domini}, 6.
\textsuperscript{185} Benedict XVI, \textit{Verbum Domini}, 50.
\textsuperscript{186} John 3:16.
\textsuperscript{187} Romans 10:10.
\textsuperscript{188} Nevin, “Wilberforce on the Incarnation,” 77.
On one hand, Christ certainly saves by his divine nature. The forgiveness of sins is an authority which “God alone”\textsuperscript{189} possesses, and the original Creator was needed to re-create his creatures.\textsuperscript{190} Through Christ’s “divine power” and “promises” people can become “partakers of the divine nature” and be saved from the “corruption that is in the world.”\textsuperscript{191} Classic Protestantism reminds that soteriology includes a declarative, forensic aspect.\textsuperscript{192} On the other hand, evangelical theologies cannot forget the sharing of Christ’s humanity in salvation. He shared in the humanity of others in order to deliver them from their deepest fear.\textsuperscript{193}

Christ’s “eternal salvation”\textsuperscript{194} was revealed during “the days of his flesh”\textsuperscript{195} “through suffering.”\textsuperscript{196} God “shows” “his love for us” in Christ’s physical death “for us.”\textsuperscript{197} The latent assumption that Christ primarily saves by his deity, or simply by some distant eternal decree, denies the importance of the Incarnation. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so


\textsuperscript{190} Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16.

\textsuperscript{191} 2 Peter 1:3–4.

\textsuperscript{192} Cf. Romans 2:12–13; 3:21–22; 5:1; 8:1.


\textsuperscript{194} Hebrews 5:9.

\textsuperscript{195} Hebrews 5:7.

\textsuperscript{196} Hebrews 2:10.

\textsuperscript{197} Romans 5:8.
that you by his poverty might become rich.”¹⁹⁸ Divine “reconciliation”¹⁹⁹ comes through sharing the poverty of Christ’s humanity. It follows on God becoming united with “flesh.”²⁰⁰ The dilemma was that people, “bowed down” with evil, could not “lift up their heads towards the truth.”²⁰¹ In response, Christ identified with peoples’ sinfulness in order that they might partake in his righteousness.²⁰² The Creed says he “came down” “for our salvation;”²⁰³ the apostolic witness²⁰⁴ is that “life” was “made manifest” for the purpose of “fellowship.”²⁰⁵ “We do not merely believe in an idea; Christianity is not a philosophy but an event that God brought about in this world, a story that he pieced together in a real way and forms with us as history.”²⁰⁶ It was through his physical “blood” that people were brought near to God, and it was through his “flesh” on “the cross” that God’s people were united to each other.²⁰⁷ The “Church of God” was “obtained with his own blood.”²⁰⁸

¹⁹⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:9.
¹⁹⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:18–21.
²⁰⁰ John 1:14.
²⁰² 2 Corinthians 5:21.
²⁰⁴ 1 John 1:2–3.
²⁰⁵ Twice used in 1 John 1:2: ἐφανερώθη—made to appear, manifested.
²⁰⁶ Benedict XVI, Bishops of Switzerland.
²⁰⁷ Ephesians 2:13–16.
Christian salvation involves real participation in Christ’s humanity; it involves more than distant divine decrees. However, Christ’s humanity is more than his physical body; it includes his mind and will. Evangelicals differ among themselves on the specific roles of physical elements of their faith, such as Baptism and Holy Communion, in relation to salvation. However, none of them can dismiss the fact that matter matters. Or, they will have forgotten the Incarnation and Cross. Despite the various ways evangelicals interpret sacraments, the physically participatory aspect of salvation cannot be forgotten when one hears, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,”209 or “we were buried therefore with him by baptism,”210 and “we have been united with him.”211 Otherwise, they will slip into some form of Docetism.

Evangelicals should strive to interpret Scripture ecclesiastically because the Church is intrinsic to God’s revelation and salvation in Christ. In the Church is where people hear the saving word, participate in the sacraments, experience human fellowship, and offer communal prayers.212 The Church, Christ’s Body, is where the Savior is directly encountered. Faith must certainly have a personal component,213 but it is communal in its constitution. In Christ, “revelation is a communion of love”214 given to a society. Jesus, the fount of God’s revelation215 in whose “face” the glory of God

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209 John 6:54.
210 Romans 6:4.
211 Romans 6:5.
212 Acts 2:42.
214 Synod of Bishops, Instrumentum Laboris, 24.
215 Hebrews 1:1–2.
shines,216 “spoke openly to the world.”217 His revelation issued from a “mountain,”218 not from within a cave. His death was in a public place, and his resurrection was attested to by “many proofs,”219 including an empty tomb located in an easily accessible “garden.”220 He showed “himself alive” “to them,”221 to those whose “eyes” and ears”222 were open. An understanding of the living Christ requires faith, but it is a shared faith.223 From the beginning, the community “lifted up their eyes”224 to see Jesus as God’s Son; individuals whose “eyes were opened” immediately reported to those “gathered together.”225 Although personal faith is required of a Christian, revelation was never a private matter of “someone’s own interpretation”226 because “none of these things” were “done in a corner.”227 Even the most private revelations were confirmed by the group.228

217 John 18:19.
218 Matthew 5:1. Matthew appears to make a reference to Moses receiving the commandments on a mountain.
219 Acts 1:3.
221 Acts 1:3.
222 Matthew 13:16.
223 1 Corinthians 15:5–8.
224 Matthew 17:8.
226 2 Peter 1:20.
228 For example, cf. Jesus’ admonition to Mary in John 20:17, Paul’s confirmation by the apostles in Galatians 2:1–10, the need for prophets to be judged in 1 Corinthians 14:29, and Cornelius’ instruction to go to Peter in Acts 10.
It was the Father’s “good pleasure” to personally give his gift to the “flock.” One cannot insist on having access to God “independently of any such special economy.”

Hermeneutics must be sensitive to this salvific context. Evangelicals cannot locate themselves outside of this tangible participation in the life of Christ in his Church if they hope to expound Scripture well. Church life, including liturgy, reading of Scripture, worship, preaching, baptism, and sharing in Christ’s sufferings are not merely “externally edifying but rather an inner immersion in the presence of the Word.” When his disciples are gathered together and he stands “among them,” then their minds are able “to understand the Scriptures.” As Ignatius of Antioch said, “Where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic Church.”

Paradoxical Quality of Revelation

Attempts to interpret the “many heralds” of revelation often reveal tension in theology. At times, Christian truth is paradoxical; one truth might appear opposite another truth. Or, multiple revelatory voices might seem to clamor against others. Without an ecclesial interpreter of revelation, it is difficult to keep a full view of divine revelation.

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231 Cf. Synod of Bishops, Instrumentum Laboris, 21; and Benedict XVI, Bishops of Switzerland.


234 Ignatius of Antioch, “Letter to Smyrnaeans,” in Richardson, 8:2:115. The immediate passage reads, “Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic Church.”
A contemporary call for an ecclesial reading of Scripture is consistent with the paradoxical quality of revelation. Christian revelation puts forward dogmatic truths which can appear to contradict each other, but must be held in tension in faith. When “one truth upsets us, another truth balances it.” However, the “second truth does not restrict the first, but only places it in the proper perspective.” Paradox suggests an ongoing “search or wait for synthesis” between what, at times, appears contradictory. It is the “reverse” of synthesis and has “more charm than dialectics.” Paradox is “more realist and more modest, less tense and less hurried” than dialectics. It is a “wonderful tapestry but it cannot yet be comprised entirely within our range of vision.” It specifies “things” more than how to speak of them. It recognizes that the full synthesis between truths either hasn’t been realized or is steeped in mystery.

Ecclesiology is an element of Christian faith that needs to be kept in paradox, or its truth will be lost. As argued in the first chapter of this work, the dismissal of ecclesiology has often opened the door for removing other dogmatic claims. On one hand, Christian dogma can be very clear; it results as an ordinary element of the

235 de Lubac, Paradoxes of Faith, 11.
236 de Lubac, Paradoxes of Faith, 9.
237 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
239 Ibid.
240 de Lubac, Paradoxes of Faith, 10.
241 In this dissertation, a close distinction between dogma and doctrine exists. Dogma is a subset of doctrine. Doctrine is considered any of several teachings of Christianity. However, dogma is used to reference those doctrines which are binding as a result of their close relation to revelation; adherence to them is obligatory. Note how the term δόγμα is used in Luke 2:1: “A decree (δόγμα) went out from Caesar Augustus.” Or, consider Paul’s use of the term in Ephesians 2:15 in relation to Mosaic Law: “The law of commandments expressed in ordinances (δόγματι).” In Acts 16:4, the binding decisions of the apostles
revelatory dialogue between God and his people. God seeks to “make known to us the mystery of his will,” his “purpose,” “plan,” and what he is “about to do” in the earth; articles of faith do matter. “Through divine revelation” God conveys “eternal decisions of his will.” “The word of God draws each of us into a conversation with the Lord: the God who speaks teaches us how to speak to him.” Out of love and fidelity his people continue the personal dialogue by articulating what has been unveiled. It is only in a docile “attitude” of “prayer,” as an “act of faith,” that any dogmatics can occur. As an example, Jesus showed that ancient monotheism, and the correct identification of the sole deity, still mattered; he chided a woman who did “not know” what she believed, and then informed her that “we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.” Jesus’ recitation of the Shema demonstrates the ordinariness of dogmatic confession. The Church “gathered together to consider” Scripture in the light of “what signs and

were called δόγματα. A repeated emphasis on binding obligation occurs with the term dogma, as opposed to a more general sense of teaching in the term ‘doctrine.’ Although this distinction is not airtight, it marks the distinct understanding of dogma and doctrine in this paper. Cf. “Dogma” in New Advent, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05089a.htm.; and CCC, 88.

242 Ephesians 1:9–10.
243 Genesis 18:17.
244 DV, 6.
245 Benedict XVI, Verbum Domini, 24.
247 John 4:22. The Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4) is an example of the importance of dogma in Judaism prior to the advent of Christianity.
248 Mark 12:29–30 and John 17:3. Cf. Paul’s affirmation of monotheism in 1 Corinthians 8:4. To this day, many Jewish families continue to affirm the importance of dogma by placing the Shema on their doorposts.
wonders God had done.”251 The churches welcomed the council’s authoritative, dogmatic conclusions.252 The conveyance of these decisions “strengthened” many churches, and helped increase their “numbers.”253 Unlike some Enlightenment assumptions, dogma was not “the one real hindrance to a proper understanding” of the Scriptures.254 Instead, as part of divine dialogue, the ‘hermeneutic key’ of faith allowed the Bible “to be itself.”255 Certain teachings of the early Church held “first importance,”256 as can be seen in the fact that some were memorized as hymns.257 The dogma of Christ’s uniqueness in human salvation remained significant,258 and demonstrated the appropriateness of affirming certain claims which restricted other views. A denial of Jesus as Son equaled a denial of God and earned the label of “liar” and “antichrist.”259

251 Acts 15:12.


253 Acts 16:5.

254 Benedict XVI, God’s Word, 91. Today, biblical exegesis prior to the Enlightenment is frequently termed “pre-critical.” However, such a broad label is not necessarily accurate. As argued in the first chapter of this dissertation, a critical understanding of the text of the Bible has regularly been sought using the best tools available.


256 1 Corinthians 15:3–5.


258 Note Jesus’ proximity to God in the monotheistic passages of John 14:6–10, John 17:3, and Matthew 11:27, and in the apostolic declaration of Acts 4:12.

259 1 John 2:22–23. Braaten warns against the “lurking” temptation within the ecumenical movement to “transcend or circumvent” confessional issues. According to Braaten, “dimensions of faith” in the gospel cannot be suppressed, or the question of truth dismissed in ecumenical dialogue. “Anticonfessional” and “anticreedal” Christian communities do not provide any real help to dialogue because a nonconfessional Christianity has “never existed.” Braaten, Mother Church, 33.
On the other hand, dogma and Church teachings are paradoxical. Specific to this
work, it is understandably difficult for some to accept the suggestion of reading Holy
Scripture in the context of “one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church” when such a
congregation does not appear to exist for them. Paradoxical tension is present in
ecclesiology when what Scripture or early creeds claimed is not realized. For example,
while Christianity is possibly growing at a faster rate than at any time in its history, much
of the growth is occurring among those who do not regard ecclesial structure or “central
authority” as necessary; many of these are either evangelicals or historically influenced
by evangelicals.260 In addition, it is not difficult to contrast moral standards with the real
lives of leaders in churches. The degrading behavior of some Church leaders throughout
history, and in contemporary Church life, seems to contradict the idea of a “royal
priesthood, a holy nation.”261 How can Christ be present in such arrogant, evil people?
Often, those who thankfully appear to be committed to living holy lives nonetheless
continue to fight among themselves over which Church is the true one. How can the
claim of “one body and one Spirit”262 stand? Generally, people from all sides of “serious
dissensions” in the Church, whether in historical or contemporary times, are to

260 Pentecostal and Charismatic movements are historically traced to nineteenth-century holiness
movements and evangelicalism. In the last 100 years, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has grown
from less than a million to hundreds of millions, now representing a significant percentage of Christians
worldwide. Some estimate 27% of world Christianity is Pentecostal or charismatic. The majority of the
growth is occurring outside of mainline denominations. For example, cf. Pew Research Center,
http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-movements-and-denominations/; and the online
database, “The Atlas of Pentecostalism,” where it claims “there is no central authority.”
http://www.atlasofpentecostalism.net/.

261 1 Peter 2:9.

262 Ephesians 4:4.
“blame.”\textsuperscript{263} Division in the Church was not unheard of in the “beginnings of this one and only Church of God.”\textsuperscript{264} Yet, the apostolic vision remains in the Scripture evangelicals claim to trust. The plan remains to bring “all” to “unity” in full maturity through a structured, hierarchical Church;\textsuperscript{265} there is no second strategy. While rightly decrying abuses, evangelicals harm themselves when they dismiss, or even neglect, paradoxical ecclesiology.

In addition to realizing the paradoxical nature of revelation in relation to the Church, it is also beneficial to remember that healthy tensions exists in nearly all vital aspects of Christian faith. Ecclesiology is not the only sphere of Christianity where polyphonic voices need to be kept in tension. C. S. Lewis complained that it was assumed in many modern systems of thought that the vocabulary and some emotions of “historic” Christianity could be retained, while the “essential doctrines” should be quietly dropped.\textsuperscript{266} To many who are “educated and enlightened,” “historic Christianity is something so barbarous that no modern man can really believe it.”\textsuperscript{267} The claim of an ancient god being born, dying, and resurrecting is all considered mythical to the enlightened mind. However, Lewis argued, despite the disdain for Traditional dogma, no one can really let go of it and “cut the umbilical cord.”\textsuperscript{268} For Lewis, this was because the

\textsuperscript{263} UR, 3.

\textsuperscript{264} UR, 3. Also, Cf. Mark 9:33–34; 1 Corinthians 3:3–4; Philippians 4:2–3.

\textsuperscript{265} Ephesians 4:13–14.


\textsuperscript{267} Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” 63.

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid.
mythical aspect of Christian faith is actually the “vital and nourishing element in the
whole concern.” It is the myth that abides and “gives life.” Lewis was not suggesting
that the “historic doctrines of Christianity are merely mythical.” Instead, Lewis came to
realize that the old myths and stories of human “legend” and imagination” actually
occurred in history. “Without ceasing to be myth,” they really happened in the person of
Jesus Christ, “at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical
circumstances.” In Christ, truth was integrated with the human imagination, and myth
became fact. For Lewis, if Christians either gutted the faith of its dogmatic tensions or
watered down the old stories into moral lessons, then the truth of the faith would die. The
mystical quality in the “marriage of heaven and earth” would be lost. Tensions
perceived in Christian faith must be maintained in the journey from exegesis to theology.
Otherwise, only a restricted, even distorted, vision will occur. To this reader, the over-
arching problem with American liberal exegesis was that it attempted to interpret
Scripture outside of an ecclesial setting. In doing this, it limited its resources. The
fullness of the world of the text was neglected.

“Faith seeking understanding” is the proper response to theological paradox or
other theological tensions. The Christian theologian is to patiently accept the tension, and
vigorously work towards synthesis with an attitude of docility. The one who is impatient
with paradox will push one side or the other, and end up destroying the truth. “Does it not

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270 Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” 64.
happen that some theologians and some men of the Church change into stone the bread of truth which it is their mission to distribute?"\(^{273}\) Church history is replete with failed attempts to undo the paradoxical tension in Christian revelation.\(^{274}\)

Faith, as a reception of God’s revealed love, “is oftentimes expressed in Sacred Scripture in terms of covenant.”\(^{275}\) The loving marriage between a man and woman is a commonly repeated analogy of sacred covenant.\(^{276}\) Faith is also obligatory,\(^{277}\) with obedience directed to a person. This means it is more than assenting to facts about God. Both Vatican Councils taught that faith “is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals.”\(^{278}\) Faith in the person of God suggests he himself is “the source of the credibility of what he reveals.”\(^{279}\) The facts presented in revelation are believed because God is the “guarantor of that truth.”\(^{280}\) Faith is indeed a “gracious


\(^{274}\) In classic debates, some attempted this through Modalism or other forms of rejecting the Trinity, while others affirmed Jesus’ deity, but claimed his humanity was an illusion. From the Reformation itself onward, many have grown, many have grown impatient with the apparent conflict between sovereignty and free will, and advocated one pole to such a degree that the other end was turned into an illusion. Nineteenth-century debates between Supernaturalists and Naturists exhibited varying responses to paradoxical tensions regarding Scripture. In recent times, evangelicals who have become fatigued by on-going theological debates have frequently sought to distance themselves from almost any dogmatic claim which requires universal faith. Some emphasize the Free Church because they have lost hope of “one body.”


\(^{277}\) Romans 1:5 and 16:26. The Holy See’s website version of *DV*, 1:5 mistakenly cites Romans 13:26; however, the correct passage citation is Romans 16:26.

\(^{278}\) This quote is from *DV*, 5. It is drawn from “On Faith,” Vatican 1:3:3. “Since human beings are totally dependent on God as their creator and lord, and created reason is completely subject to uncreated truth, we are obliged to yield to God the revealer full submission of intellect and will by faith.”


address of God to man;” it ultimately “rests” on God’s grace. However, it is too restrictive to prevent faith from concomitantly being “a determination of human action.”  Human freedom is required in faith, allowing “individuals to give consummate expression to their own freedom.”

In this context, evangelicals must strive to integrate ecclesiology with their reading of Scripture. If they claim to love God, believe in his Bible, and trust in his Spirit, then they must acknowledge that the Church is part of the New Testament revelation. Despite the obvious paradoxical tension, they must patiently persevere in docility before God’s word.

In regards to biblical exegesis, an “adequate” hermeneutic of Christian revelation calls for Christians to “believe” in the Church. No single interpretive method can be complete if it excludes “any possibility that God might enter into our lives and speak to us in human words.” Faith broadens “the scope of reason,” and utilizes other important tools which help interpret revelation. Proper hermeneutic faith “never degenerates into fideism,” but it works in harmony with other interpretive methods. Modern theology must avoid the “temptations” of neglecting ecclesiology and never achieving a “comprehensive exegesis which enables the exegete, together with the whole

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284 Apostles’ Creed.
286 Ibid.
287 Ibid.
Church, to arrive at the full sense of the texts.”

Through ecclesial faith, the various scriptural texts are seen in their unity; the “individual texts of the Bible” are read “in the context of the whole.” An analogy to illustrate the role of ecclesial faith in hermeneutics can be found in the science of binocular vision. Wholesome single vision, which exists in most mammals, is the benefit of binocular eyesight. Single vision occurs when each eye perceives the same object at a slightly different angle, creating depth perception; two distinct angled views are fused together to create a single three-dimensional image in the mind. The fullness of the object is ascertained in a unified view. Stereopsis, the “most precise kind of depth perception,” is a major benefit of having two healthy eyes in the same head. In addition, binocular vision in mammals broadens their field of view and helps compensate for natural blind spots. Ecclesial faith provides hermeneutics with binocular vision. It gives a distinct perception of revelation, and helps prevent the full image from being partially apprehended in a single dimension of knowing. Fideism and unbridled skepticism are alike dismissed because they each would inhibit full exegesis of revelation due to only providing a limited, single angle. “Faith alone makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently.”


God often reveals himself in paradox and is found in what looks least like him, even his opposite. Yet, he expects human fidelity in response. Augustine found similar philosophical “truth” in Christianity as he did in the Platonists’ ideas, but he was shocked, and then moved by the humility of God in the lowly flesh of Christ. “None of this is in the Platonist books.”

Martin Luther found ultimate antithesis in the cross. God’s “human nature, weakness, foolishness” are seen in the cross. Further, it is only the one who sees the “humility and shame” of God displayed on the cross that “deserves to be called a theologian.”

On one hand, the perspicuity of Scripture was obvious to Luther, with some “straightforward affirmations” being neither “obscure” nor “ambiguous.” However, at other times, Luther realized that “God hides himself, and wills to be unknown to us.” Yet, even in the dark times, the believer should “have no concern.” As John Paul II reminded, “It should nonetheless be kept in mind that Revelation remains charged with mystery.”

While this dissertation is a theology rather than a biblical study, and is focused on the philosophy behind hermeneutics rather than the sequential activities of a specific exegetical method, it is important to briefly insert here the need for critical exegetical

296 Cf. Luther, “The Bondage of the Will,” in Dillenberger, 190.
method. As Legaspi pointed out, the Bible functions as both confessional Scripture and academic text. The theologian’s goal is to integrate those two realities. This dissertation naturally risks deemphasizing the need to analyze the Bible as human literature due to its intense focus on ecclesial interpretation. Biblical studies cannot naively afford to interpret the Bible simply as it reads; fideism and hyper-literalism are not helpful. Rather, while affirming the faith that Scripture is God’s written word, it is vital to attempt to understand the world of the text, including the authorship, dating, redactions, antiquated world views, and genre of each biblical document. The accent of faith in this dissertation does not intend to diminish the importance of such critical biblical studies. However, this too becomes a theological point of importance for evangelicals. If the Bible is God’s written word, and the writings are also humanly generated, then it is of the utmost importance that Scripture be subjected to a full literary analysis. For example, if an individual refuses to accept the possibility that God may have selected non-historical literary genres for some portions of Scripture, then he has disrespected the written word. If an individual insists that every portion of Scripture, including poetic and prehistorical sections, be forced to fit into the genre of a contemporary newspaper, then he has disrespected the God behind the Bible. Alternatively, biblical studies are insufficient to interpret the Scripture without the eye of faith, provided by historical apostolic witness. If the individual biblical scholar attempts to authoritatively determine the full meaning of the text without reference to the ongoing faith behind the text, then he will jeopardize flattening the text, and missing its literary intent. The sensitivity of interpreting ambiguities in the sacred text is precisely why Scripture must be interpreted in the faith
of a living Church which is immersed in the life stream of historical Christianity. Binocular vision is needed for hermeneutics of Scripture.

Evangelicals need to accept the paradox of ecclesial hermeneutics without trying to artificially remove the tension. While the corruption of leaders and systems seems apparent in all Christian denominations, ecclesiology, as an intrinsic element of Christian revelation, is essential to biblical interpretation. The New Testament clearly teaches that God is in his people. The Spirit of Christ is promised to lead his people “into all the truth.” Instead of trying to remove the tension of this claim, even to the degree of dismissing historic dogma, evangelicals need to patiently strive in faith to find the synthesis of the paradox. Unfortunately, when it comes to such patient faith, “we do not want a mysterious God.”

Practically Engaging Catholicism

After considering the ecclesiastical characteristics of revelation, evangelicals need to return to a face-to-face encounter with the Catholic Church. With clear critical empathy, they need to engage the Catholic Church during the hermeneutic process. Evangelicals do not need to surrender what might be considered legitimate contentions, but they need to open themselves to their own misunderstandings and attempt to positively listen to and learn from Catholics while interpreting Scripture. This is consistent with the Scriptures evangelicals claim to uphold. While this work concludes that a full, positive interface is not possible in this generation due to “blame” on both

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300 de Lubac, Paradoxes of Faith, 214.
sides, it offers practical reasons why attempts are needed, and suggests practical next steps of engagement.

**Contextualizing the Discussion**

Without some ecclesiastical form, how can anyone meaningfully discuss theological problems? Evangelicals need a formal context in which the deepest matters of faith and morals can be discussed. The Catholic Church provides an important part of that setting. Formal Catholic conversations on a multiplicity of topics can be traced back to early days of Christianity. The Catholic Church provides a legitimate context for conversation.

The Catholic Church has benefited everyone by working through their own problems, even if imperfectly. Certainly, some Catholic theologians stray and get trapped in a particular generation’s *zeitgeist*, but the Catholic Church over all demonstrates resilience. This is because of its formal ecclesial structure with its inherent ability to correct itself. Catholicism has a way of critically opposing modernism, and ultimately transforming it with the Gospel. Evangelicals will want to avoid final judgments of the Catholic Church based on snapshot images from a particular generation. Instead, they will benefit themselves by considering the panoramic view of Catholic thought as they work through many of their own modern social and moral dilemmas. When it comes to engaging modernity, evangelicals may find they have more in common with Catholics than they realized.

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301 A similar question was posed by David Tracy in his 2003 lecture at Boston College (Tracy, “Faith in God and Church Order: The Catholic Case of Martin Luther”). In addition, Carl Braaten criticizes the reality that “religious reflection” usually occurs in the academy instead of the Church (Braaten, *Mother Church*, 5).
Keeping Focus on the Text

Evangelicals desire to stay focused on the text of Scripture. However, over time, that is difficult without an ecclesiastical form. The Catholic Church provides a perennial structure that ironically helps evangelicals return from distractions to a direct engagement with the Scriptures. The Catholic Church’s theology, recently in the works of Benedict XVI, emphasizes a holistic or “canonical” reading of Scripture, much of which should resonate with evangelical thinking. The biblical text is attempted to be read in its presumed unity in the faith of the Church, historic and contemporary, while integrating various tools and methods of interpretation. It allows the text to speak for itself in its fullness. Further, while integrating various exegetical tools, it prevents dominance of the text by a particular scientific method, a literal fundamentalism, or a local narrative community.

Greater attention to the text of Scripture assists in the verbalization of dogma. Teaching the Scriptures rightly is one of the most important duties of Catholic bishops. The evangelical exegete is referred directly to the text of Scripture when he examines various Catholic teachings. This helps realign his focus.

Maintaining Mystery

The Catholic Church perceives itself as historically maintaining the mystery of God “manifested in the flesh” through its very existence. Through their ecclesiology,

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303 Cf. DV 25, Synod of Bishops, Instrumentum Laboris, 48; Benedict XVI, Verbum Domini, 78, 94.

304 1 Timothy 3:15.
they have attempted to keep the salvific mystery of the Incarnation at the forefront. Christ, who is in heaven with the “Father,” is “continually active in the world” in order that people might be “partakers of his glorious life.” Catholic ecclesiology has continuously integrated the idea of the ongoing divine presence of the Logos in the visible, tangible form of God’s people, thus making the Church the “universal sacrament” of salvation. By articulating this, they have touched the nerve of a fundamental flaw in much of modern Christianity.

While evangelicals and other Christians disagree with several specific conclusions of Catholic ecclesiology, they must regard the need of keeping the mystery of God “manifested in the flesh” at the forefront. Since the Reformation, Christian communities have gradually deemphasized a sacramental Church that mediates the divine mystery. Diminishing mystery manifests itself in many ways in Church life, theology, and morals. The broad neglect of ecclesiology and specific anti-Catholic bias is at the root of the problem. The contemporary Catholic Church is needed by evangelicals as a tangible reminder of the importance of mystery in normal Christian life, including life in the Church.

The Catholic Church also helps evangelicals open themselves to the universal dimension of Christianity. Christianity has a historical basis in Jesus Christ. This historical foundation should not be forfeited to an ahistorical theology. The Church at Rome is one of only a few other churches which can claim to trace its historical origins


back to the actual apostles. Although this may appear to carry no theological weight for some evangelicals, the historical importance is significant. The Catholic Church offers a long and broad view of the history of Christian thought; it connects the contemporary person with the founding, formative Tradition of the Christian faith.

However, the historical significance of the Catholic Church does translate into theological significance. The belief in one God guiding history to an Eschaton means that each moment matters. It is the responsibility of each generation of Christians to see the inner connection they have to historic manifestations of Christianity; confidence in the Spirit is needed to properly interpret this history.\footnote{While citing Paul’s reference to Abraham (Romans 4:17), Barth mentioned the “non-historical radiance” which “obliterates” historical and personal isolation. For Barth, liberal scholars could not reduce Abraham to irrelevancy simply because he was a particular character from a distant past. Although Abraham was historical and visible, the father of a particular people, he became the father of many nations by directing people to the non-historical and invisible God who conditions all of history. For Barth, the Logos, as “the light of all history and all life,” is “beyond history,” and brings human history into relation with the “unknown God” (Barth, Romans, 140–147). Similarly, to this reader, evangelicals need to be wary of any form of Biblicism which diminishes an understanding of the living Christ as being ever present in his people, including the Catholic Church.}

Even those who think that the true Church is only an eschatological reality admit the importance of history by default. God is leading somewhere!\footnote{Catholics, too, need to consider this. Protestantism, as well as evangelicalism, is more than an irregularity in the economy of God. The Lord of the Church might be speaking through the events of the last several centuries.} This highlights one of the dangers of a sterile reading of Scripture: the full revelation of God, who shows himself throughout history and in his Church, is truncated. Dispensationalist eschatology often exhibits this flaw. In it, the Church Age is sometimes reduced to an apostate period with no real value in reading the perspicuous Bible.\footnote{Even Luther’s later denunciation of the pope and identification of him as the Anti-Christ had a sense of history. For Luther, the events and characters of his day had historical significance in the broader plan of God.} The Catholic Church helps evangelicals by providing a broader
perspective on Providential time and history. Evangelicals often consider themselves justified pointing out moral and theological faults in the Catholic ecclesial structure, as well as noting an unwillingness by Catholics to admit those flaws; however, evangelicals hurt themselves if they condemn the entire edifice.

Practical Steps of Engagement

Following are a few practical suggestions for evangelicals to engage the Catholic Church in the process of biblical interpretation. None of these are revolutionary or contrary to evangelical convictions. However, due to polemics, they are often neglected.

Trust in God’s Providence

As people who believe in the inspiration of the Bible and its claim of the active Holy Spirit, evangelicals need to respect the providential formation of the Catholic Church. Divine organization within a visible Church structure is a biblical idea. This does not necessarily translate to an indefectible Church, or that the pope is infallible at any moment, or that he should be the supreme authority in the worldwide Church. Nor does it mean that those who refuse to submit to the Catholic Church are necessarily “deficient.” Nonetheless, it does mean that God’s providential establishment of authority needs to be respected. Minimally, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Catholic Church to oversee its own flock needs to be appreciated as a gift from God to his people.

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310 *UR*, 3.

311 Observe the tension between Romans 13:1 and Acts 5:29.
Churches, in general, need to be understood as visible expressions of God’s love; they are not meant to be impositions on human freedom. In the Christian Churches, the “chief Shepherd” cares for his flock through the people to whom he has given “oversight.” In addition, Christ evangelistically brings his light into a dark world through his organized people. Evangelicals can appreciate the moving of the Spirit in the Catholic Church without agreeing with their fully-developed ecclesiology.

**Dialogue with Family**

Catholics are brothers and sisters in the Christian faith. Hence, familial conversation needs to occur. Dialogue is a practical way for evangelicals to interface with the Catholic Church. Dialogue can include personal contact, debate, and sharing of literature. Contemporary Catholic theologians have written on all the hot topics over which evangelicals are concerned. They, too, have dealt with modernity and the Bible. Evangelicals will benefit by engaging contemporary Catholics through listening and debate. In the process, they will often encounter thoughtful people who genuinely care about their Christian faith. The different perspectives of Catholics can open evangelicals to new views which resonate with evangelical faith. Catholic theological literature is one

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312 1 Peter 5:4.

313 1 Peter 5:2.

314 Matthew 5:14.

of the greatest treasures available to evangelicals, but such wealth is rarely utilized into evangelical literary works. In addition, a Catholic education can provide a healthy broadening of one’s evangelical perspective.

Dialogue with the Catholic Church is also beneficial because it opens its vast library. The literary wealth of historic Catholic assets can be found in many locations, including creeds, councils, sermons, polemics, and histories. Protestant Ressourcement, including a specific effort to retrieve ancient creeds, must still utilize Catholic resources. Evangelicals who cut themselves off from Catholic sources make it difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Christian faith.

The development of dogma is a benefit of dialogue with the Catholic Church. As mentioned earlier, many evangelical “What We Believe” declarations are retooled ecclesiastical statements, many of which predated the Reformation. Dialogue is healthy, but it is also considered fashionable. Agnostic idolatry is a danger with dialogue. When caught in the enticing trap, some are devoted to the conversation but disdain conclusions. The Apostolic description of “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth”\textsuperscript{316} is a recurring temptation. Yet, the Catholic Church can help an evangelical at this point. Dialogue with other Christians, such as Catholics, who utilize dogmatics can help the evangelical determine which doctrines are binding, and which can be let go.

**Reading Scripture in the Context of Mystery**

Critical empathy calls for an imaginative projection of oneself into the other in order to understand the other. Without losing one’s own identity, the evangelical must

\textsuperscript{316} 2 Timothy 3:7.
seek to understand Catholicism from the inside. Assuming that the Spirit is operative in the Catholic Church, this can be attempted in uncomplicated manners.

Evangelicals can listen together with Catholics to the word of God. Through the Holy Scripture, Christ is speaking to his Church. Evangelicals can sit silently with Catholics before the Scripture, or exegete it with them. These efforts can also include public worship with a common lectionary, following a liturgical calendar, or a more personal and meditative “divine” reading (lectio divina). It also involves communal prayer. Just as evangelicals should avoid reading the Bible in a sterile vacuum, they should not always pray alone.

These are only elementary suggestions, but they might be groundbreaking to some evangelicals. Worship is not just vertical and heavenward. It is also how God’s people stay connected, learn from each other, and prepare for a new day. “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as in the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”317

Conclusion

Evangelical theology must attempt what is “not possible,” and positively apply effective post-critical methods of critiquing its own hermeneutical models and misunderstandings of the Catholic Church. Near the heart of this effort must be a relocation of the Bible in its original ecclesial context. The result of this will be a necessary attempt to interface with the Catholic Church. Despite the dim hopes of

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accomplishing much in this generation, these aggressive steps must be undertaken out of obedience to the Scriptures evangelicals claim to uphold, and the Lord they confess to love.
CONCLUSION

The old spiritual assures its listener, “There is a Balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole.” For the evangelical, Christ is that Balm. Evangelicals desire to bring Christ to the world through conveying the gospel. The point of this dissertation is to remind evangelicals that Christ is found among His people. Therefore, any responsible interpretation of his words must occur among His people.

Evangelicals have a wonderful opportunity to mature in their faith by developing a more stable hermeneutic. From the beginning of Christianity, an axiomatic relationship was assumed between Church and Scripture. Despite severe polemics, and even schisms, this assumption was maintained. Through the various developments of Biblicism, formal ecclesiology was cordoned off, in some hermeneutical models, from the work of exegesis. History shows that exegesis of Scripture outside of formal ecclesiology is imbalanced. It habitually results in theological conclusions which presume to alter immutable dogma. Equally harmful, it is incapable of preventing fragmentation of Christian unity. Polemics are a natural part of any healthy discussion. However, without an ecclesial home for those discussions to occur, people often forget they are family.

This brings evangelicals to face the Catholic Church. Although differences appear practically irresolvable, the apostolic directive to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”\(^1\) remains in effect. Without discounting doctrinal differences

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\(^1\) Ephesians 4:3.
between evangelicals and Catholics, this dissertation has attempted to elucidate that the Catholic Church, due to its ecclesiology, has superior capabilities to honestly engage modernity. It has the ability that all Christianity should have through the Incarnation: in its engagement with modernity, it can incorporate and ultimately transform what it encounters. Although the effect of engaging the world might create a sense of instability for a season, ecclesiology functions as a counterbalance. Evangelicals need more than a general ecclesiology; they need the Catholic Church if they hope to have equilibrium in their exegetical efforts. Similar to David Steinmetz’s comments regarding recent Protestant interest in Thomas Aquinas, evangelicals need to “put an end to their own self-imposed impoverishment.” If they sincerely trust in Scripture and Christ’s promise of the Holy Spirit, then they should acknowledge the contemporary need for the Catholic Church. It is a hermeneutical “development long overdue.”

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