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TEACHING OF SACRED SCRIPTURE AND FAITH

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I. Introduction

a. Situating the problem in my personal experience

My first class on the Bible came in my second year of the university. Having gone to public school up to that point, I had never studied the Bible before besides in faith formation as a child. The class was "Introduction to the Old Testament." What I remember of the course is that the professor was very interested in the subject matter. I have vague memories of the Book of Genesis since he had done some graduate work in that area. But the biggest impression left on me was from our study are the tough passages of the OT. We were given no help in understanding the difficult questions about God or faith that arise from such passages. The passage on which I wrote a paper was Judges 19:22-30, the atrocious scene of the killing and dissecting of the Levite's concubine. I was about 19 years old when I took this course. At this point I was blessed with a strong faith being then in college seminary. You might say, I had enough faith to survive my OT class! I left confused, but what about my classmates who were typical college students. This might have been their only study of Sacred Scripture and frankly, if they did not yet have faith, it would have been difficult to foster it after such an experience.

Priests will often complain to me how bad their Biblical Studies courses were. There was one priest with whom I lived at the Casa Santa Maria here in the same piazza as the Biblicum. He and I got along well and had plenty of good conversations. But after a couple of years he asked me, "What do you study over there? I mean, I know you, but do they believe anything?" I was a bit surprised by his comments until I found out that in the early 1980's when he was in seminary the only assigned reading he had for his Gospel of John course was Bultmann's commentary.

Such suspicion of Biblical Studies is not limited to the United States. Last summer I met a priest from Kenya who was preaching in my archdiocese to raise money for his own. He told me he would never want to study the Bible as I had done. He told me that the first day of his Pentateuch class his professor began with JDEP and never looked back. It was a dry, difficult experience the whole semester. Obviously, for those of us who teach the Pentateuch source theories are an important part of teach-

ing those books of the Bible. Sadly, however, the impression that was left on this priest was that the Bible had gone through a serious surgery, being dissected, and in the end it was not resuscitated; there was no life!

b. The Concern of the Synod of the Word of God

So the question we are here to ponder together is before us: how do we teach the Bible being true to the rigorous formation in Biblical Studies we have received while integrating a sense of faith. How do we not only teach our students about Biblical things but even more to leave them with a profound love of the Sacred Scriptures, those divinely revealed realities inspired by the Holy Spirit (cf. DV11), as *Dei Verbum* describes them? Such was the concern of the Synod on the Word of God held in this city in October 2008 seen in Proposition 27:

The synodal fathers, therefore, with esteem address an appeal, both to theologians as well as exegetes, so that, with a clearer and more harmonious collaboration, they will not fail to give contemporary theology the force of the Scriptures, and not reduce the study of the Scriptures to the historiographic dimension of the inspired texts. "When exegesis is not theology, Scripture cannot be the soul of theology and, vice-versa, when theology is not essentially interpretation of Scripture in the Church, such theology loses its foundation" (Benedict XVI, Oct. 14, 2008).

II. Overcoming these negative influences with my opening lecture for seminarians in first cycle

To start off, I would like to share how I begin my opening lecture the first time I have class with the theologians in their first year of theology. The class is predominantly seminarians but in any given semester may have some lay graduate students. In this opening lecture I begin with a provocative quote from a description for a recent book:

In this radical critique of his own academic specialty, biblical scholar Hector Avalos calls for an end to biblical studies as we know them. . . . [A]cademic biblical scholarship has clearly succeeded in showing that the ancient civilization that produced the Bible held beliefs about the origin, nature, and purpose of the world and humanity that are fundamentally opposed to the views of modern society. The Bible is thus largely irrelevant to the needs and concerns of contemporary human beings In a controversial conclusion, Avalos argues that our world is best served by leaving the Bible as a relic of an ancient civilization instead of a "living" document most religionist scholars believe it should be. He urges his colleagues to concentrate on educating the broader society to recognize the irrelevance and even violent effects of the Bible in modern life.¹

There is a bit of a shock in the classroom and a few giggles since it is such a radical statement. I then juxtapose a quote from St. Bonaventure that is in the Office of Readings (Monday Week V, Ordinary Time):

The source of sacred Scripture was not human research but divine revelation. This revelation comes from the *Father of Light from whom the whole concept of fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives*. From him, through Jesus Christ his Son, the Holy Spirit enters into us. Then through the Holy Spirit who allots and apportions his gifts to each person as he wishes, we receive the gift of faith, *and through faith Christ lives in our hearts*. So we come to know Christ and this knowledge becomes the main source of a firm understanding of the truth of all sacred Scripture. It is impossible, therefore, for anyone to achieve this understanding unless he first receives the gift of faith in Christ. This faith is the foundation of the whole Bible, a lamp and a key to its understanding.

¹ <http://www.bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=6354>

So who is right? My students lean surely towards St. Bonaventure but how do we know that our faith is not an imposition on the text of Scripture? How would one begin to justify the role of faith in studying Scripture?

From this point I lead them through a chapter in a very fine doctoral thesis done at the Gregorian by Peter Williamson under the faithful tutelage of Fr. Swetnam. It is entitled, *Catholic Principles for Understanding Scripture*.² It is a commentary on the 1993 instruction *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (IBC) issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Chapter 6 of Williamson's work is called "A Hermeneutic of Faith." By means of this chapter I pose the question how is Scripture different than Homer or some other ancient piece of literature. Fundamentally, the object of Sacred Scripture is different; while concerning past events it is also an "abiding means of communication and communion" between God and his believing people;³ Homer is not. Thus, since the object is one in which God communicates the light of faith is necessary to interpret it. Without belief in God and in Jesus Christ one remains an outside observer not able to penetrate the full depth of meaning. With faith one can "perceive the reality of which the language [of the Bible] speaks."⁴ Faith is, thus, the pre-understanding needed to interpret Scripture. Quoting the IBC, Williamson says, "Catholic exegesis 'deliberately places itself within the living tradition of the Church, whose first concern is fidelity to the revelation attested by the Bible' (III.b)."⁵ Williamson then directly addresses the critique that such an *a priori* commitment to faith compromises the critical nature of exegesis leading instead to eisegesis.⁶ In a footnote Williamson quotes the now Cardinal Vanhoye who says that prescinding from faith in the name of interpreting the Scriptures objectively is to mistakenly treat them as the object of the physical sciences, "objectivity in the humanities cannot be the same as it is in the physical sciences, since the object of study is radically different."⁷ Since the Bible is about religious experiences and appeals to man's religious capacity faith is needed. One can learn a lot about the Scriptures through historical and philological studies but in the words of Vanhoye, "The essence escapes him."⁸ It is like looking through a window into a family's home while they eat supper. By watching you can learn a lot about the family but you will miss the essence of the conversation. Faith, in biblical interpretation, puts you at the table. As I have heard Fr. Swetnam say on several occasions and we will hear him say it in a little bit, the Bible is made up of documents of faith by people of faith to inspire faith. Without faith we will not only not understand Scripture we will not teach it well. My students, therefore, see that St. Bonaventure was on to something and perhaps more importantly they see that their professor is not out to undermine their faith but rather to offer it a Scriptural foundation.

² Peter Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Understanding Scripture* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute 2001). Specifically I use parts of chapter 6, "A Hermeneutic of Faith" pp. 95-108.

³ Ibid. 96.

⁴ Ibid. 97.

⁵ Ibid. 97.

⁶ Ibid. 100.

⁷ Ibid. 101-102, footnote 20.

⁸ Ibid. 103.

III. An academic effort to respond to the invitation of the Synod fathers from Oct 2008

a. Introduction to the Monsignor Jerome D. Quinn Institute of Biblical Studies

The institute named after Msgr. Quinn began in October 2008. He was a priest of my archdiocese who taught in our seminary, the St. Paul Seminary, where I now teach and direct this Institute. His family and friends wanted to memorialize his scholarship and to continue the work to which he had dedicated his life. One way the Institute accomplishes this end is to gather scholars for small conferences in order to produce scholarly work for the needs of the Church with a particular eye to priestly formation. The planning for our inaugural conference proceeded right as the Holy Father was calling the 12th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God held in October 2008. Taking our lead from the Synod, we entitled our inaugural conference in June 2009, *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church: Integrating Biblical Studies and Theology in the Formation of Priests*.

The aim of this conference was to respond to the Synod's appeal by pursuing the vision presented by the Synod Fathers: the integration of the exegetical and theological dimensions of the Scriptures. We wanted to provide a forum for scholars teaching in Catholic seminaries to consider how to impart to seminarians both a love of the Scriptures and a means of entering into them in both their historical and theological aspects. Our keynote speaker was Fr. James Swetnam, S.J. He has dedicated much time and energy to thinking about the role of faith in studying Sacred Scripture and so will now present his opening paper from that conference.

b. Fr. James Swetnam, S.J., "Toward a More Explicitly Catholic Approach to the Teaching of Sacred Scripture" (June 11, 2009)

c. Discussion (large group and/or small groups)

IV. Teaching the Bible and Faith: Some examples from the Quinn Conference 2009

a. Examples (These and all the papers from the conference are posted on our website):

i. Excerpts from Dr. Peter Williamson's work, "Scripture across the Curriculum: Pastoral Ministry and Mission"⁹

What can we do to form candidates for the priesthood who are prepared to minister the Word of God fruitfully in the life and mission of the Church? Drawing on the recommendations of the International Synod of Bishops in 2008, the suggestions of some of my [Williamson's] colleagues at Sacred Heart Major Seminary, and my own reflection, I would like to offer some remedial proposals for the spiritual and intellectual formation of seminarians in relation to Sacred Scripture. On the basis of the Synod's observation that part of the problem in forming competent ministers of the word stems from a problematic "separation" among the theological disciplines (Prop. 27), I propose an integrated approach to Scripture across the academic curriculum.

⁹ See <http://www.stthomas.edu/spssod/pdf/articles/williamson.pdf> for full text of this article. Excerpts are from pages 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 13.

Examples of Professor Williamson's proposals:

2. From the outset seminarians should be taught that "the priest is first of all a 'minister of the Word of God,'(PDV 26; cf. PDV 47) and that for this reason, reading, praying and studying Scripture is of the highest priority.
4. When seminarians begin to pray the Liturgy of the Hours they should receive instruction that explains how to pray the psalms as Christian prayer, including an introduction to the traditional typological interpretation of the psalms.
9. Scripture courses should not only interpret texts in their literary and historical contexts, but also teach a theological hermeneutic that reads texts in light of the canon, tradition, and the analogy of faith.
11. Although seminarians should be acquainted with the exegetical methods of scholars, they should be trained in a practical method of Scripture study that they can use in the limited time they will have for preparing homilies and that they incorporate in a lifelong program of personal study.
16. To counter the tendency toward a proof-texting approach (which can distort Scripture's meaning by de-contextualizing texts) and to help seminarians to grasp the integral relation between Scripture and doctrine, a longer portion of Scripture that is relevant to the topic should also be assigned and discussed in theology and pastoral courses. For example, Colossians in Christology, the Pastoral Epistles in a course on pastoral care, James in moral theology, Romans 1-8 in Christian Anthropology, etc.
24. At least one written assignment in each dogma class should ask the seminarian to write a homily or catechesis that explains a doctrine from Scripture.
26. Seminarians should be brought to see how Scripture addresses a wide range of moral topics, from the value of human work, to ecology, to the role of government, etc., and how Scripture is the source for much of the Church's moral teaching.

ii. Summary of Msgr. Michael Magee's "Combining Synchronic and Diachronic Methodology in Teaching the Pentateuch"¹⁰

Msgr. Michael Magee agrees that there are good reasons to do a synchronic study of the Pentateuch prior to a diachronic one (cf. Jean Louis Ska, S.J., *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*). When it comes to teaching seminarians it was clear that they enjoyed the synchronic study because the synchronic tools "provided them with guidelines for presenting the essential message of the story to others, as they could see themselves doing either in preaching or in teaching." (p.3) "When the focus shifted more heavily onto the more analytical and diachronic [methods], however, the tone of the class became less enthusiastic...." (p.4)

What has shown to be more effective is "employing a synchronic reading of the Pentateuch for the basic structure of the entire course . . . [I]t seems advisable to do so on the basis of one principal methodology, and Thomas Mann's principally narra-

¹⁰ See <http://www.stthomas.edu/spssod/pdf/articles/Combining%20Synchronic.pdf> for the full text of the article.

tive reading seemed to function admirably for this purpose." (p.7) The synchronic reading being the backbone enabled the class to pause on carefully selected passages so that other diachronic methodologies could be applied. For example, "when the parallel contents of the law codes of the Pentateuch were encountered for the second or third time in the reading of the books of Moses in their canonical form, this recurrence . . . provided an obvious occasion for showing students the manner in which the same material had apparently been re-worked by various human authors at different times in Israel's history. . . . [W]hen these [passages] were encountered successively over the course of a survey of the canonical form of the Pentateuch rather than as a project of comparison abstracted from the whole, what emerged more readily and more clearly was the insight that the re-working of the material could be regarded as somewhat akin to the evolution of dogma in the Church, with the parallel processes in the Bible and in the Church seen as mutually validating." (p.6)

"The utility of such a choice, furthermore, is due not to any lack of openness that today's seminarians have towards scholarly exegetical methodology, whether synchronic or diachronic. Instead, such a choice in teaching the Pentateuch is called for by the seminarians' openness to their own future ministry, in which they know they will be called upon to unfold for God's people, not the pre-history of the biblical text, but rather its divine unity and its everlasting message." (p.8)

iii. Excerpt from Prof. Kelly Anderson, "The Liturgy of the Hours as an Effective Means for Teaching the Book of Psalms"¹¹

Any modern scholarship on the psalms that needs to be presented can be done within the framework of the LOH. In other words, modern research does not have to be simply set aside (nor ought it be!) but can be subsumed into the reading of the LOH, which the Synod of Bishops in 2008 exhorted be done.

Exegetical knowledge must, therefore, weave itself indissolubly with spiritual and theological tradition so that the divine and human unity of Jesus Christ and Scripture is not broken. In this rediscovered harmony, the face of Christ will shine in its fullness and help us to discover another unity, that profound and intimate unity of Sacred Scriptures [sic].¹²

Since the students are earning a graduate degree from our institutions, it is necessary that they have a grasp on recent research and scholarship. We would ill-equip them for service if they cannot talk broadly on current developments or read a recent article on the subject of the psalms. At the same time, the final scope needs to be that of encountering Jesus Christ.

In my opinion there appear to be four sections which need to be presented as an introduction to the psalms.¹³ First, an overview of the Psalter itself ought to be presented [including, for instance, the] division of the Psalter into five books. . . . The student ought to be aware of the titles of the psalms and how these contribute to forming the various categories. The instructor could also discuss various canonical issues, especially in light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. A second trajectory should be an

¹¹ See

<http://www.stthomas.edu/spssod/pdf/articles/Psalms%20in%20the%20Liturg1.pdf>
for full text of this article. Excerpt is taken from pages 8-9.

¹² *Message to the People of God of the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, no. 6.

¹³ This is flexible and is determined in light of how much time is available to an instructor.

overview of Hebrew poetry, as well as a presentation of literary and rhetorical devices within the psalms themselves. Third, a presentation of form criticism and genres ought to be given. Gunkel's ideas still affect nearly all other branches of work, and these provide a useful means for discussing psalms. Further, nearly every commentary assumes a rudimentary knowledge. Finally, a brief overview of the research that deals with the editing of the Psalter ought to be presented. Since this research is still in flux, however, it might not be too beneficial to go into much depth. I would offer that these four tools should be sufficient for a more in-depth look at the psalms. A few articles could also be assigned to fill out the student's knowledge on these topics.

Once an introduction has been made, an overview of the LOH could be presented, complete with the overall theological thrust of the prayers. Then, the instructor could chose one day, either a Friday or Sunday, and lead the students through each of the hours. Beginning with the psalms of Lauds, the instructor could trace the development of the day through Compline.

Each psalm could be first looked at as a microcosm, using such techniques as literary or rhetorical criticism. The particular structure, language, genre, etc., could be identified along with its supposed *Sitz im Leben*. At that point, the field of interest should widen and the psalm could be examined in light of its context, first in that hour (for example, Lauds) and then the day in general. The seminarian could learn how to *read* the psalms by employing modern methods but *pray* the psalms to encounter Jesus Christ.¹⁴ Thus, the seminarian would learn modern methods in an ancient context. The seminarian could then, eventually, take one of the hours, or even a day, from the LOH and demonstrate that he has learned to do this type of exegesis himself.

b. Discussion (large group and/or small groups)

¹⁴ An example of this can be found in John Paul II, *Psalms and Canticles: Meditations and Catechesis on the Psalms and Canticles of Morning Prayer* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2004).

TOWARD A MORE EXPLICITLY CATHOLIC APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

JAMES SWETNAM, S.J.

It is an honor for me to be able to address a group of the alumni/ae of the Pontifical Biblical Institute where I was a student and where I have spent so many years of my life (fifty in all) on the staff.¹⁵

Personal Background

I would like to begin my presentation by giving something about my background. Although my formal course work at the Pontifical Biblical Institute was limited to the teaching of Introductory Greek and Hebrew (for thirty-six years), elsewhere, beginning in the 1960s but particularly since my retirement from the Biblical Institute in 2003, I have taught exegesis to a great variety of students. This teaching was an invaluable help for my conducting seminars at the Biblical Institute for more than twenty years, and vice versa.

Further, ever since my ordination in 1958 I have been concerned to get as much pastoral experience as a priest as possible. This has taken on the form of countless homilies, numerous presentations of "Lectio Divina", and more than seventy Ignatian "retreats" in various parts of the world, retreats in which Scripture figured prominently. In addition, for twenty-two years I have been the delegate of the Pontifical Biblical Institute to the Catholic Biblical Federation, the official organization of the Catholic Church for the pastoral use of the Bible, and have attended international meetings of this organization in Bogotá, Hong Kong and Beirut. I consider this pastoral experience quite germane and quite important for the challenge of explicitly teaching Scripture academically according to the mind of the Church.

Three "Clusters of Concern"

My experience in the teaching of Scripture suggests to me three main "clusters of concern" which seem to me relevant for our meeting here at the Biblicum's centenary celebration:¹⁶

- 1) the fundamental importance of teaching Scripture explicitly in the context of my Roman Catholic faith;
- 2) the fundamental importance of focusing primarily on the meaning of the text as it stands;
- 3) the fundamental importance of assuring that what I teach can be the basis for pastoral relevance in the contemporary world.

¹⁵ This paper is an adaptation of the inaugural address given at The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity at the foundation of the Monsignor Jerome D. Quinn Institute of Biblical Studies, June 11, 2009.

¹⁶ It is by no means my intention that the mind of the Church that the approaches to the teaching of Scripture be limited to the three "clusters of concern" enumerated below. But it is my contention that these three clusters are at the center of what is needed.

1) *Teaching Scripture Explicitly in the Context of Faith*

Basic to my teaching of Scripture is the conviction that it should be explicitly rooted in my Catholic faith as taught by the Magisterium of the Church (the “analogy of faith” as understood in the context of the Roman Catholic Church, if you will).¹⁷ This implies that what I teach about the meaning of the text should in no way be opposed to the great Tradition of the Catholic Church as presented in the Church’s official doctrine. My basic responsibility is to understand the meaning of a text in the explicit context of my faith, not in the implicit context of the Enlightenment. Every exegesis involves presuppositions, and, as I see it, every teacher of exegesis should explicitly indicate his presuppositions at the beginning of each course. He should not be judged on the basis of these presuppositions, but (in part at least) on the basis of the consistency attained between his exegesis and his presuppositions as well as by the coherence of the meaning he proposes and objective indications in the text.

Does this mean that all the scholarly research of the past has to be disregarded if it is not in accord with my presuppositions based on my Catholic faith? Of course not. The results of scholarly research of all ages, no matter how it has been arrived at or what it is, is an immense treasure and an invaluable tool for investigating the meaning of Scripture, no matter what were the presuppositions involved in their production. The crucial question is, How should this research be brought to bear on my understanding of a text as I view it through the lens of faith?

As I see it, my faith should not only be a negative norm so that, for example, I can discount any interpretation of Scripture which says that God does not exist or that he is evil. As I see it faith should also be a positive norm, a kind of flashlight which allows me to look at a text and see better what is objectively there. Obviously this light should not be a license for my indulging in eisegesis: the integrity of the text has to be respected at all time, and this means that nothing should be read into it. There are objective norms built into the text itself or its context for checking whether a proposed exegesis respects the integrity of the text or not. But these objective norms are not always easy to come by, and this is where my faith as flashlight can help.

Further, it should always be remembered that exegesis deals in plausibility. If a rival interpretation can be shown from objective norms to be more plausible, by all means it should be adopted. But plausibility frequently depends on one’s presuppositions as regards a text, and not on objective norms in the text or context themselves. It is part of the art of exegesis to be not only objectively savvy, i.e., knowledgeable about the text being interpreted, but also subjectively savvy, i.e., reflectively knowledgeable about oneself as exegete.

2) *Teaching Scripture and the Meaning of the Text as Its Stands*

Contemporary Catholic exegesis came to be in the context of the need for a vigorous defense of the authenticity of the biblical text. This need for a vigorous defense

¹⁷ Cf. the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, §10. For a convenient source of official Church documentation in the context of a holistic presentation of the entire matter in an organic context cf. P. Williamson, *Principles of Catholic Interpretation in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”* 1993 (Subsidia Biblica 22; Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2001), pp. 137-141.

was grounded in a variety of causes, e.g., a very late dating of the text of John's Gospel and the attendant denial of the reliability of what John's Gospel says. Or, the obvious similarities among the Synoptic Gospels and the resultant search for an explanation of these similarities, a search that in turn led to an investigation into sources. For decades this investigation into the sources of the Scriptural text has resulted in the formation of a mentality which often tends to see in this investigation the underlying fundamental goal of scholarly research. Only in the past thirty to forty years has the focus on the meaning of the text as it stands assumed in many places the primary importance if deserves. Investigation of the sources of a text should normally be in the context of what a text means, and not vice versa.¹⁸ Or so it seems to me.

This assumed priority of research into the sources of the Scriptural text seems to me to be at the root of the often testy defense of the "historical-critical method", it also seems to me. If the historical-critical method is identified as the basis for scholarly study of Scripture, then any impugning of the historical-critical method will be taken as an attack on serious study of the Bible. And the alternative of serious study of the Bible is assumed to be a sort of obscurantism, a denial of the vast heritage of scholarly research of the past several hundred years.

Further, it also seems to me that the "historical-critical method" should be regarded as a multi-splendored thing made up of a variety of results of the scholarly study of Scripture in its original context. Source criticism is only one part of this method, and not even the most important part at that. Philological research seems to me to be a much more valuable source for the contemporary scholarly study of Scripture than source criticism, for example.

Focusing on the meaning of the text as it stands means focusing on the meaning of the text as it was intended by the original author. It is the recovery of this original meaning, as that meaning was intended to be understood by the original addressees of the text, that should be the primary goal of biblical scholarship of any age. Or so it seems to me. This search for the author's intention is usually possible only from objective indications in the text. But the author/editor had a purpose in writing or editing what he did, and as far as possible this purpose should be the object of what the exegete is looking for.

3) Teaching Scripture and the Fundamental Importance of Relevance

Frequently the insistence on the centrality of the original meaning of the biblical text seems to be taken as implying that serious academic study of the Bible should be value-neutral as regards the pastoral use of the Bible. An analogy with the relation between "pure science" and "applied science" (i.e., technology) seems to be taken for granted in some cases, with the superiority of pure science being assumed to be so obvious that any attempt to link scholarly research to pastoral use is seen as a demeaning. The scholar who brings pastoral concern explicitly into his field of vision is a disloyal to his academic colleagues by sullyng the objective purity and disinterestedness of their research.

From a different perspective, how can writings from a culture, a place and a time so different from ours possibly be translated from that culture, place and time to our

¹⁸ Cf. Williamson, p. 31.

culture, place and time? The basic reply to this legitimate question depends on whether the exegete is interested in presenting what the original meaning of the text was in all its fullness. For the original meaning of the text was intended by an author who wrote in a spirit of faith, for persons who listened/read in a spirit of faith, and about persons who lived their lives in the context of faith. It is the religious meaning of the text in the context of a lived faith which is the bridge which serves to link the world of yesterday with the world of today.¹⁹

By centering his/her exegesis on the religious aspect of the text the exegete makes possible the appearance of the relevance of that text for today. For example, if the faith-trust of Abraham at the moment of the Aqedah is brought into focus in the exegesis of Genesis 22, the perceptive person of faith in a culture radically different from that of pre-Christian Israel can see the relevance of that faith-trust for his or her own life. An exegesis which zeroes in on what Genesis 22 teaches about child-sacrifice or covenant or the place in which the Aqedah occurred is not helpful unless it is viewed in the context of this faith-trust. Or so it seems to me.

What I Hope For from This Gathering

The recurrence of the phrase “it seems to me” in the above presentation of the “Clusters of Concern” should indicate what I hope for from this gathering. I have personally dedicated a considerable amount of reflection to the role of faith in objective interpretation of the Bible, to the role of the importance of what the text means, to the role of pastoral relevance in academic exegesis. I have read and pondered. But I have never had a chance to attend a meeting in which such topics as these (and others as well) are subjected to a critical analysis by my peers. As I have attempted to make clear, I think that an exegete should take explicit, reflective awareness of how he does exegesis and why: “The unexamined exegetical life is not worth living”. Well, that may be a bit strong. But at least one can say that the unexamined exegetical life can profit from a large dose of explicitness about basics.

But there is an important caveat in all of this. I personally do not want the word to get out that I am taking part in these proceedings because I think Catholic exegesis is not being practiced anywhere in the world. And this for the simple reason that I think Catholic exegesis *is* being practiced elsewhere in the world. But, as I said above, I think more attention to reflexive self-criticism would benefit all of us exegetes, neophytes and veterans, believers and non-believers alike, no matter in what tradition (i.e., with what presuppositions) we work.

In a word, I hope that you leave this presentation not with the conviction that all of our exegetical problems as a Catholic are resolved, but with the conviction that some of our exegetical problems have been illumined.

¹⁹ Cf. Williamson, pp. 148-160.