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The Theology of the Senses of Scripture According to Joseph Ratzinger and Thomas Aquinas

**Teologia sensów Pisma Świętego według Josepha Ratzingera
i Tomasza z Akwinu**

ABSTRACT: Joseph Ratzinger recognized the doctrine of the four senses of Scripture, although he reinterpreted it in a new context. He referred with appreciation and at the same time critically to Thomas Aquinas' understanding of the senses of Scripture, emphasizing in particular the importance attached to the literal sense in medieval biblical hermeneutics. This article presents Ratzinger's and Thomas Aquinas' understanding of biblical senses. Particular emphasis is placed on the fundamental assumptions, primarily theological, of both approaches. The article addresses the issue of the relationship between spiritual and literal sense, the relationship between divine and human authorship, and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Attention is also drawn to the Christological-pneumatological and teleological interpretation of Scripture, the understanding of salvation history, and the properties of human language in which the word of God was communicated. The necessity of moving from the letter to the spirit of inspired texts was also strongly emphasized. The research began with Ratzinger's legacy, and then, based on the results obtained, the thought of the Angelic Doctor was systematized. Due to this approach both the similarities and differences between the approaches of the two scholars were brought to light.

KEYWORDS: Joseph Ratzinger, Thomas Aquinas, senses of Scripture, doctrine of the four senses, literal sense vs spiritual sense, biblical hermeneutics, Christological hermeneutics, letter and spirit, Old Testament and New Testament, salvation history, authorship of Scripture

ABSTRAKT: Joseph Ratzinger uznawał doktrynę czterech sensów Pisma Świętego, choć reinterpretował ją w nowym kontekście. Z uznaniem, a zarazem krytycznie odwoływał się do pojmowania sensów Pisma Świętego przez Tomasza z Akwinu, zwłaszcza podkreślał wagę przykładaną do sensu dosłownego w średniowiecznej hermeneutyce

biblijnej. W artykule zaprezentowano rozumienie sensów biblijnych przez Ratzingera i Tomasza z Akwinu. Szczególny akcent został położony na fundamentalne założenia, przede wszystkim teologiczne, obu podejść. Podjęto kwestię związku sensu duchowego z dosłownym, relację między autorstwem boskim i ludzkim, związek między Starym a Nowym Testamentem. Zwrócono także uwagę na chrystologiczno-pneumatologiczną i teleologiczną interpretację Pisma, rozumienie historii zbawienia oraz na właściwości ludzkiego języka, w którym wypowiedziane zostało słowo Boże. Mocno wybrzmiała także konieczność przechodzenia od litery do ducha tekstów natchnionych. Badania rozpoczęto od spuścizny bawarskiego teologa, by na podstawie uzyskanych wyników uporządkować następnie myśl Doktora Anielskiego. Pozwoliło to uwypuklić zarówno podobieństwa, jak i różnice między ujęciem obu uczonych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Joseph Ratzinger, Tomasz z Akwinu, sensy Pisma Świętego, doktryna czterech sensów, sens dosłowny a sens duchowy, hermeneutyka biblijna, hermeneutyka chrystologiczna, litera a duch, Stary Testament a Nowy Testament, historia zbawienia, autorstwo Pisma Świętego

Introduction

In his monograph *The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture: Testing the Ratzinger Paradigm*, Aaron Pidel noted that Joseph Ratzinger took both an affirmative and critical stance toward Thomas Aquinas' understanding of the four senses:

On the one hand, Ratzinger praises Aquinas as a master of teleological hermeneutics, who rightly finds in Christ the culmination of salvation history. What is more, by insisting that the deeper meanings cannot contradict the historically indicated meaning, Ratzinger maintains in his own way Aquinas' principle that the literal sense serves as the foundation for the spiritual senses. . . . But unlike Aquinas, Ratzinger would hesitate to confine the premises of theological argumentation to the literal sense.¹

While one can agree with the above observation, Pidel's interpretation of this assessment seems not to be entirely accurate. According to the scholar,

Ratzinger's disagreement owes partly to his anachronistic identification of Aquinas' literal sense with the historical-critically indicated sense. . . . But it also has partly to do with Ratzinger's effective-historical model of the fourfold sense,

¹ Aaron Pidel, *The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture: Testing the Ratzinger Paradigm*, Verbum Domini Series (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 134–35.

whereby the literal sense and spiritual senses interpenetrate too much to be isolated with clinical precision.²

In my opinion, the first sentence is far from being true, while the second does not explain Ratzinger's position in a satisfactory manner.

This article is intended to present Ratzinger's and Thomas Aquinas' understanding of biblical senses. I would like to place particular emphasis on the fundamental assumptions, primarily theological, that determined the approaches of both scholars. My aim is to show in what ways Ratzinger's and Aquinas' approaches are similar and in what ways they differ. I will begin with Ratzinger,³ whose legacy will allow me to organize the thoughts of the Angelic Doctor⁴ in such a way that the goal of the article is achieved.

Joseph Ratzinger's Understanding of the Senses of Scripture

The Literal and Spiritual Senses “without confusion and without separation”

Recognizing in *Verbum Domini* the importance of the exegetical approach of the Church Fathers, Benedict XVI recalled that they placed the comprehensive

² Cf. Pidel, *The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture*, 135.

³ The reflections contained in this article will be discussed in more detail in the articles I drew on Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “Aktualność egzegezy patrystycznej we współczesnej egzegezie według Josepha Ratzingera,” *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia*, [forthcoming]; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “Cztery wymiary słowa – Benedykta XVI reinterpretacja doktryny czterech sensów Pisma Świętego,” *Studia Bobolanum*, [forthcoming]; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “Josepha Ratzingera zasada chrystologiczno-pneumatologiczna w hermeneutyce biblijnej,” *Studia Koszalińsko-Kotobrzeskie*, [forthcoming].

⁴ I refer to my earlier and planned publications: Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “What Place Does Scripture Have in Thomas Aquinas's Reasoning?,” *Collectanea Theologica* 94, no. 1 (2024): 107–66, <https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2024.94.1.04>; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “Tomasza z Akwinu obrona doktryny czyścą,” *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 17, no. 3 (2024): 317–49, <https://doi.org/10.12775/bptb.2024.017>; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “Chrystus Zmartwychwstały a sensy Pisma Świętego: Refleksje na kanwie twórczości Tomasza z Akwinu,” in *Wokół pytań o Zmartwychwstanie*, ed. Damian Wąsek and Przemysław Artemiuk (Kraków: Wydawnictwo “scriptum”, 2025), 237–301; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “Sens dosłowny i duchowy w świetle kwestii quodlibetalnych Tomasza z Akwinu,” *Collectanea Theologica* 95, no. 2 (2025): 265–316, <https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2025.95.2.02>; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “Sensy Pisma Świętego w *Summie teologicznej* św. Tomasza z Akwinu,” *Rocznik Tomistyczny*, [forthcoming].

study of Scripture at the center and interpreted it in unity with the pilgrim Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁵ The Pope wrote: “... we learn from the Fathers that exegesis ‘is truly faithful to the proper intention of biblical texts when it goes not only to the heart of their formulation to find the reality of faith there expressed, but also seeks to link this reality to the experience of faith in our present world’” (VD 37).⁶ Although in patristic and medieval times the philological and historical achievements of today were not available, attempts were made to start from the literal sense of Scripture (VD 37).⁷ Benedict XVI also notes that “in patristic and medieval times every form of exegesis, including the literal form, was carried out on the basis of faith, without there necessarily being any distinction between the *literal sense* and the *spiritual sense*” (VD 37).⁸

Benedict XVI, in the spirit of Leo XIII’s encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* and Pius XII’s *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, calls for the rejection of “a split between the human and the divine, between scientific research and respect for the faith,

⁵ Benedykt XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (September 30, 2010), no. 37 (hereafter: VD). See also Aurelius Augustinus, “De libero arbitrio,” III, XXI, 59, in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 32 (Paris: Migne, 1877); Aurelius Augustinus, “De Trinitate,” II, I, 2, in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 42 (Paris: Migne, 1886); Andrzej Proniewski, “L’ermeneutica del sensus fidei in Joseph Ratzinger,” *Studia Koszalińsko-Kolobrzeskie* 21 (2014): 152; Matthew J. Ramage, “Scripture and Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Ratzinger*, ed. Daniel Cardó and Uwe Michael Lang, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 94: “Endeavoring to retrieve the patristic approach to revelation, Ratzinger adds that, for the Fathers, ‘tradition is simply *Scriptura in ecclesia*’ – the playing out of Scripture in the living organism of the Church.”

⁶ Quoted after Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (April 23, 1993), II, A, 2, https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm. Cf. R. Jared Staudt, “Reality and Sign: Thomas Aquinas and the Christological Exegesis of Pope Benedict XVI,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 12, no. 1 (2014): 350.

⁷ Cf. VD 32 (“... the sound ecclesial tradition has always demonstrated a love for the study of the ‘letter’”); Sancti Thome Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, art. 10, ad 1, *Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. Edita*, 4–12 (Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinæ; Editori di San Tommaso, 1888–1906) (hereafter: ST) (“all the senses of sacred Scripture are based on the literal sense”; cited in VD 37 and CCC 116). Cf. also Pidel, *The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture*, 135; Staudt, “Reality and Sign,” 350.

⁸ Latin: “Memoretur tamen oportet quod patristica et mediaevali aetate quodlibet genus exegesis, etiam litteralis, agebatur sub fundamentis fidei et distinctio non necessario dabatur inter sensum litteralem et sensum spiritualem.” Cf. Staudt, “Reality and Sign,” 348: “Aquinas’s position ... indicates that the literal sense should not be confined simply to the human author’s intention, which would need to be ascertained historically. Rather, he affirms the primacy of God’s authorship, which includes the human author’s intentions but can also exceed them. From this perspective, sometimes what today would be called the spiritual sense may actually be part of the literal sense.”

between the literal sense and the spiritual sense" (VD 33).⁹ Referring to the classic couplet on the senses of Scripture,¹⁰ he writes that in this couplet "the unity and interrelation between the *literal sense* and the *spiritual sense*" (VD 37) are noticeable. Therefore, his recovery of the traditional doctrine of the four senses is also its modernization in a new, scientific (historical-critical method) context. Hence, the Pope postulates the coexistence of two methodological levels in exegesis, historical-critical and theological (VD 34). According to Nina Sophie Heereman, these correspond to the classical teaching of the two senses of Scripture.¹¹ But, one may add, only on condition that the historical-critical method itself becomes a theological method – because in such a situation, one can speak of a quasi-Chalcedonian connection between the two levels of Bible study, which "does not in any way mean to separate or oppose them, nor simply to juxtapose them" (VD 35).¹²

The author of the exhortation refers to the contemporary definition of the literal sense – he writes, drawing on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,¹³ that it is "the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation" (VD 37; CCC 116). One might conclude that Benedict XVI intends to emphasize more clearly than in the Middle Ages both the difference between the literal and spiritual senses (hence, taking into account the limitations of the historical-critical method, he acknowledges its value) and the unity between the two senses, so that the spiritual sense is connected with the literal one. Importantly, in line with the approach of the Church Fathers, the Pope believes that reaching the literal sense already presupposes faith, even at the stage of using the historical-critical method – "[t]he lack of a hermeneutic of faith" means that "in its place there

⁹ Cf. Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 56.

¹⁰ "Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, / Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia" – VD 37.

¹¹ Heereman, Nina Sophie. "Joseph Ratzinger's Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis of the Old Testament." *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 110. <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.17184>.

¹² Cf. Nicolas Bossu and Sameer Advani, "Resolving the Dualism Between Exegesis and Theology: Joseph Ratzinger and the Rediscovery of Tradition: A Case Study of the Purification of the Temple (Jn 2:13–25)," *Alpha Omega* 23, no. 1 (2020): 50; Staudt, "Reality and Sign," 355; Stefan Szymik, "Benedykt XVI hermeneutyka wiary," *The Biblical Annals* 2 (2012): 220; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, *Hermeneutyka wiary w nauczaniu papieża Benedykta XVI*, Bibliotheca Biblica (Wrocław: Tum, Wydawnictwo Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej, 2014), 115–22.

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993), https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM (hereafter: CCC).

inevitably enters another hermeneutic, a positivistic and *secularized hermeneutic* ultimately based on the conviction that the Divine does not intervene in human history" (VD 35).¹⁴

This will be discussed further in the article, but it is worth mentioning now that, in Ratzinger's opinion, contemporary exegetical and literary research allows us to recover and reinterpret the theory of the multiple senses of Scripture. Ratzinger prefers to speak not so much of senses as of dimensions of the meaning of the text.¹⁵ As he explained in 2003 in his discussion of the *Catechism*, "[t]here is first of all the so-called literal sense, that is, the historical-literary meaning, which an exegete seeks to re-present as the expression of the historical moment of the origin of the text." The allegorical sense, discredited in modern times, can be derived from the fact that "[i]n the word, once you take it out of an earlier limited historical context, it actually contains a method of faith, which inserts this text within the whole of the Bible, and beyond that time directed as is every time, coming from God and going to God."¹⁶ The moral dimension is determined by the fact that the word of God also gives direction, and the eschatological dimension (in Tradition: "anagogical") results from moving toward what is definitive and striving in that direction.¹⁷ The *Catechism* emphasizes that "the profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church" (CCC 115).

The Historical-Critical Method and Patristic Exegesis

Ratzinger's interpretative approach is described as "post-critical": the historical-critical method is not rejected, but transcended in such a way as to preserve

¹⁴ See also VD 39 and 47. When asked why Ratzinger does not limit himself to pure historical reasoning, Roch Kereszty gives one reason: "Benedict knows that in the concrete order of salvation, no human being exists in the mere (pure) state of nature." (Roch Kereszty, "The Challenge of Jesus of Nazareth For Theologians," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34 [2007]: 462).

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, "Current Doctrinal Relevance of the Catechism of the Catholic Church," October 9, 2002, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20021009_ratzinger-catechetical-congress_en.html.

¹⁶ Ratzinger. Cf. CCC 116–17.

¹⁷ Ratzinger, "Current Doctrinal Relevance"; CCC 117. Cf. Przemysław Przyślak, "Via biblica," in *Via Benedicta: The Scholarly Method of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI*, ed. Bogdan Ferdek and Wiktor Trojnar (Wrocław: Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław, 2019), 22.

the achievements of the “critical” period.¹⁸ Pablo Blanco-Sarto maintains that in Ratzinger’s interpretation *cum traditione*, “the writings of the Fathers offer a horizon that can be further enriched – in a line of continuity rather than of rupture – with the consonant contributions of contemporary exegesis.”¹⁹ The most important aspect of this approach is the recognition of the value of the historical-critical method, while at the same time calling for it to become a theological method. Only in this way can it become useful in discerning the literal sense, and thus also indirectly contribute to the discovery of the spiritual sense, which must be based on the literal.

This found expression, among other things, in the methodological remarks recorded in *Jesus of Nazareth*. Exegesis should submit to the historical-critical method because the *factum historicum* is the basis of the Christian faith. However, this method, whose limitations Ratzinger was aware of like few others, does not exhaust biblical interpretation.²⁰ Ratzinger therefore proposes to combine it with other methods (in the spirit of DV 12) and, above all, insists it should become a theological discipline:

¹⁸ Cf. Wright IV, William M. “Pre-Gospel Traditions and Post-Critical Interpretation in Benedict XVI’s *Jesus of Nazareth: Volume 2*.” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 10, no. 4 (2012), 1017; Denis Farkasfalvy, “In Search of a ‘Post-Critical’ Method of Biblical Interpretation for Catholic Theology,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 13 (1986): 288.

¹⁹ Pablo Blanco-Sarto, “Catholics and Lutherans on Scripture: A Proposal by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI,” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 57–62, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.16754>. Cf. Matteo Crimella, “Hermeneutical and Exegetical Assumptions in the Work ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI: Some Examples,” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 129, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.17194>: “Thus, the choice is to combine the results of historical-critical exegesis and the great patristic and medieval tradition, so uniting the historical hermeneutic and that of faith.”

²⁰ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xv–xix; Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. the Vatican Secretariat of State (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011), xvi–xvii. See also Blanco-Sarto, “Catholics and Lutherans,” 56; Denis Farkasfalvy, “Jesus of Nazareth and the Renewal of New Testament Theology,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34, no. 3 (2007): 440, 453; Scott W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 34–36, 42–43. It is worth adding that Ratzinger compares his work “with the theological treatise on the mysteries of the life of Jesus, presented in its classic form by Saint Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* (ST III, qq. 27–59), although “it is nevertheless situated in a different historical and spiritual context, and in that sense it also has a different inner objective that determines the structure of the text in essential ways” – Joseph Ratzinger, “*Holy Week*,” xvi.

... it must take a methodological step forward and see itself once again as a theological discipline, without abandoning its historical character. It must learn that the positivistic hermeneutic on which it has been based does not constitute the only valid and definitively evolved rational approach; rather, it constitutes a specific and historically conditioned form of rationality that is both open to correction and completion and in need of it. It must recognize that a properly developed faith-hermeneutic is appropriate to the text and can be combined with a historical hermeneutic, aware of its limits, so as to form a methodological whole.²¹

The author of *Jesus of Nazareth* expects that “the great insights of patristic exegesis will be [thus] able to yield their fruit once more in a new context.”²²

In the paper entitled “Importance of the Fathers for the Structure of Faith” (Die Bedeutung der Vater im Aufbau des Glaubens), Ratzinger noted that “we might seem justified in asserting that the importance of the Fathers for Catholic theology has been, as it were, dogmatized.”²³ As he wrote, the question about the Church Fathers conceals the issue of theology existing between the worlds

²¹ Ratzinger, “*Holy Week*,” xiv–xv. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Conflict: On the Foundations and the Itinerary of Exegesis Today,” trans. Adrian Walker, in *Opening up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. José Granados, Carlos Granados, and Luis Sánchez Navarro, Ressourcement (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 29. Cf. also Zatwardnicki, *Hermeneutyka wiary*, 97–108. Ezio Prato points out that the hermeneutical question reveals the relationship between faith and reason, which, according to Ratzinger, cannot be understood as narrowly as it has been in modern times – cf. Ezio Prato, “La parola di Dio è il fondamento di tutto: Esegesi storico-critica ed ermeneutica teologica secondo Joseph Ratzinger – Benedetto XVI,” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2014): 156, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.17370>.

²² Ratzinger, “*Holy Week*,” xv. Cf. Matthew J. Ramage, *Dark Passages of the Bible: Engaging Scripture with Benedict XVI & Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 82. Ratzinger wrote in the Preface to the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission that the constitution on Divine Revelation “provided us with a synthesis, which substantially remains, between the lasting insights of patristic theology and the new methodological understanding of the moderns” – Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible*. For the beliefs characteristic of traditional interpretation present in *Dei Verbum*, see Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 47–60, 152–53.

²³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), 135. Cf. e.g., DV 23. Cf. also Manuel Arostegi Esnaola, “I Padri come risposta (Antwort) alla Parola (Wort),” in *In Storia e Mistero: Una chiave di accesso alla teologia di Joseph Ratzinger e Jean Daniélou*, ed. Giulio Maspero and Jonah Lynch (Roma: EDUSC, 2016), 43–44.

of faith and science, in which one can see the former difficulty of reconciling the relationship between *auctoritas* and *ratio*.²⁴

In response to a question about the function of the Fathers in the structure of faith, Ratzinger pointed to the relationship between the word and the response. Although the word of God and the response of the Church Fathers cannot be intermingled, they must not be separated either – the response has become co-constitutive for the duration of the word of God.²⁵ As he put it, “[o]nly because the word [*Wort*] has found its answering word [*Ant-wort*] does it continue to be a word and to become effective.”²⁶ Ratzinger points to four elements that determine the irrevocability of the response given by the Church Fathers: the establishment of the canon of Scripture, the rule of faith (and its function in establishing the canon), the liturgical heritage (the reading of Scripture and the profession of faith were liturgical acts), and the commitment to rational responsibility for faith (*credo ut intelligam* as a condition for the persistence of faith).²⁷ According to Ratzinger, the enduring significance of the Fathers is expressed in the unity of the Bible, liturgy, and theology developed by the patristics.²⁸

Scott Hahn notes that a similar structure also characterizes Benedict XVI’s biblical theology, in which “can be seen the essential unity of and continuity between the Old and New Testaments, Scripture and liturgy, faith and reason, and exegesis and dogma.” According to this scholar, “[i]t is a theology that is

²⁴ Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 137. Cf. also Proniewski, “L’ermeneutica,” 152.

²⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 147. Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “*Regula Fidei* in the Light of Joseph Ratzinger’s Writings,” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 26, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.16744>. José Granados links this conviction to the Bavarian theologian’s understanding of Revelation, developed on the basis of his studies of St. Bonaventure – cf. José Granados, “The Fathers of the Church,” in *The Cambridge Companions to Joseph Ratzinger*, ed. Daniel Cardó and Uwe Michael Lang, *Cambridge Companions to Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 109–25. On Ratzinger’s research on the Seraphic Doctor, see Marianne Schlosser and Franz-Xaver Heibl, eds., *Gegenwart der Offenbarung: Zu den Bonaventura-Forschungen Joseph Ratzingers*, *Ratzinger-Studien* 2 (Regensburg: Pustet, 2011).

²⁶ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 147. Cf. Arostegi Esnaola, “I Padri come risposta,” 58–59; Bossu and Advani, “Resolving the Dualism,” 55; Mary McCaughey, “Through the Lens of the Pure in Heart: Ratzinger’s Theological Approach and the Interpretation of Revelation,” *Annales Theologici* 32, no. 1 (2018): 128, <https://doi.org/10.3308/ath.v32i1.275>; Proniewski, “L’ermeneutica,” 152.

²⁷ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 148–51. See also Zatwardnicki, “*Regula Fidei*,” 27; Arostegi Esnaola, “I Padri come risposta,” 58, 63–67.

²⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 151–52; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 83.

Christological, ecclesiological, and liturgical . . .”²⁹ Two elements appear to be most important for understanding Ratzinger’s conception of literal and spiritual senses: canon³⁰ and the rational responsibility of faith.³¹ The theologian emphasizes that one cannot go back to the Fathers or the Middle Ages and contrast them with modernity, but neither can one abandon the achievements of the exegesis of the Fathers or medieval philosophy.³² The new step that the scholar demanded from the historical-critical method is related to the reform of the understanding of rationality and the search for a “better philosophy” corresponding to the biblical text.³³ Ratzinger thus refers to the important decisions of the ancient Church concerning the relationship between faith and the search for human reason.³⁴

One History of Salvation and the Triple Authorship of Scripture

In 2003, Ratzinger stated that the starting point for the development of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* were questions about what Scripture is and what makes a heterogeneous collection of writings become a holy book. As the cardinal explained, what is specific to the Christian faith is its reference to a coherent history in which God acted. Due to the factual nature of events in the Christian faith, there should be room for the historical method; due to God’s action, the events described in the inspired books carry something that transcends their pure historical factuality and comes from outside themselves. Ratzinger emphasized that the “more” present in the events of salvation history

²⁹ Hahn, 23–24.

³⁰ Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 149: “Where the writings of the New Testament are read as canon and the Old Testament is read as the Christian Bible, there we find ourselves in the intellectual ambience of the struggle of the first centuries; there we have as Fathers those who were then teachers of the Church.”

³¹ Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 151: “It was, in fact, the precondition for the survival of Christendom in the ancient West, and it is the precondition for the survival of the Christian way of life today and tomorrow. This ‘rationalism’ of the Fathers has been often enough criticized, but its critics have, nevertheless, been unable to abandon the course it set . . .”

³² Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 19. Cf. also Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 56.

³³ Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 20; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 95; Zatwardnicki, *Hermeneutyka wiary*, 101–6.

³⁴ Benedict XVI, “*Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections*: Meeting with the Representatives of Science, Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg,” September 12, 2006, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_benxvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html.

is inseparable from the facts and is not a meaning imposed on these events later, “from outside.” The history of salvation attested to in the biblical books is more than an expression of the historical experience of the People of God; it is a means by which God acting in the People speaks.³⁵ According to Ratzinger, we can therefore speak of a triple authorship of Scripture:

The figure of the “author,” which is so important for historical research, is therefore articulated on three levels: the individual author is in fact supported in his turn by the people as a whole. . . . In the end, it is not simply an individual author who speaks, rather the texts grow in a process of reflection, culture, and new understanding which surpasses each individual author. It is precisely in this process of continual surpassing, which relativizes the individual authors, that a more profound transcendence is at work: in this process of surpassing, of purification, of growth, the inspiring Spirit is at work, who in the word guides the facts and events and in the events and facts newly inspires the word.³⁶

This complexity of authorship is, of course, matched by the complexity of interpreting Scripture. Theological interpretation can only be discussed once the ultimate authority acting in the People of God has been taken into account. This type of interpretation does not abolish historical interpretation, but expands it by a new dimension. Hence, Ratzinger continued, the *Catechism* presented a dual dimension of biblical interpretation: historical interpretation (the intentions of the authors, the circumstances of the time and culture, the ways of thinking, speaking, and narrating at that time) and other methodological elements resulting from the unity of the Book and treating it as the basis of the life of the People of God (the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church, the analogy of faith).³⁷

³⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance.”

³⁶ Ratzinger. Cf. Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “Benedykt XVI teologia natchnienia biblijnego,” *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 16, no. 3 (2023): 326, <https://doi.org/10.12775/BPTh.2023.020>; Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 114; Anthony C. Sciglitano Jr., “Pope Benedict XVI’s Jesus of Nazareth: Agape and Logos,” *Pro Ecclesia* 17, no. 2 (2008): 167, <https://doi.org/10.1177/106385120801700203>: “Benedict thinks that scriptural texts emerge from a community of faith in relation to another ‘author,’ God. Because the same God travels with Israel throughout its lengthy history, new and fuller meanings can be given to earlier images and stories so that their words can carry more meaning in the future than their human authors know at any given time.”

³⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance.” Cf. CCC 109, 112–14; DV 12. William M. Wright IV notes a tension in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (1965) (hereafter: DV). On the one hand, it postulates the search for *intentio auctoris*, thus

According to this approach, one can speak of a kind of relativization of the historical *intentio auctoris*. The potential meaning of a given text, Ratzinger argues, “is always being more fully disclosed, and therefore no text belongs simply to a single historical author”; one cannot “confine it to a determined historical moment and keep it there; in this case it would be confined to the past . . .”³⁸ As A. Pidel notes Ratzinger’s approach transforms the neo-Thomistic notion of the dyadic schema (divine author – human author). Firstly, it is the People of God who is indicated as an intending subject, internal to Scripture; secondly, this corporate intentionality has complex layers; and thirdly, it is Scripture (and not the hagiographer) that intends Christ as the final truth. Scripture always exists in connection with a living subject and therefore “intends” its own content. The focus is shifted from the author to the overarching intentionality of the entire Bible, and its global intention is identified with the internally diverse mystery of Christ. Pidel illustrates this approach with a metaphor of light refracting in the prism of human history with its successive stages. The perception of the pure light of Christ requires a reversal of direction: from individual bands (Old Testament, New Testament, Church) towards a common center.³⁹

In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger also included among the essential aspects of theological exegesis the relationship of Scripture to the People of God as the living subject of Scripture, in whom Scripture originated and in whom it lives. The author of the work emphasized three mutually interacting subjects: (i) the individual author (group of authors); (ii) on a deeper level, the People of God, to whom the authors belong and on whose behalf and for whom they speak; (iii) God, who guides the People of God and speaks to them through people and their humanity.⁴⁰ Ratzinger emphasizes the two-way connection between Scripture and the subject of the People of God:

On the one hand, this book – Scripture – is the measure that comes from God, the power directing the people. On the other hand, though, Scripture lives precisely within this people, even as this people transcends itself in Scripture.

focusing attention on the text (DV 12), while on the other hand, it presents a sacramental theology of history and refers exegesis to the history of salvation presented in the text (DV 2) – William M. Wright IV, “*Dei Verbum*,” in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 83–85.

³⁸ Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance.”

³⁹ See Aaron Pidel, “Joseph Ratzinger on Biblical Inerrancy,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 12, no. 1 (2014): 308, 314, 317–19, 321.

⁴⁰ See Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xx–xxi.

Through their self-transcendence (a fruit, at the deepest level, of the incarnate Word) they become the people of *God*.

It is from Christ that the People of God receive their existence, which is also expressed in the written word of God, always present in the People of God.⁴¹ The relationship between Scripture and the People of God should not be limited only to the origins of the inspired books; it remains decisive for the entire history of the Church and the interpretation of Scripture.⁴²

The Word of God and the Multidimensionality of Human Speech

The author of *Jesus of Nazareth*, while appreciating the importance of historical-critical reconstructions of the original meaning of words written in a given place and time, points out that there is an intrinsic added value in human words. This is even more true of biblical words, which have matured along the history of the faith of God's people. In these words, the author does not speak from himself and for himself.⁴³

He is speaking from the perspective of a common history that sustains him and that already implicitly contains the possibilities of its future, of the further stages of its journey. . . . At this point we get a glimmer, even on the historical level, of what inspiration means: The author does not speak as a private, self-contained subject. He speaks in a living community, that is to say, in a living historical movement not created by him, nor even by the collective, but which is led forward by a greater power that is at work.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xxi. Cf. Emery de Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI the Christocentric Shift* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 97; Ramage, *Dark Passages*, 62; Farkasfalvy, “Jesus of Nazareth,” 442: “He also presupposes a certain concept of history which he applies to the concept of revelation: revelation is itself history, and Scripture comes about in a cumulative series of rereadings, conditioned by the interplay of both divine illumination of chosen individuals and the communal appropriation of the meanings assigned to events and experiences.”

⁴² Cf. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 64: “Benedict believes that if we want to come up with theological, hermeneutical, and exegetical methods that have genuine explanatory power, we need to know where Scripture came from, how it was formed, and what were its original intention and function.”

⁴³ Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xx.

⁴⁴ Ratzinger, xx. Cf. Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 109.

Ultimately, it is the Divine Author who determines the multiple senses of Scripture, but on the other hand, this is only possible because human language itself allows for such a multiplicity. Ratzinger's approach allows him to reinterpret the traditional doctrine of the four senses: "There are dimensions of the word that the old doctrine of the fourfold sense of Scripture pinpointed with remarkable accuracy. The four senses of Scripture are not individual meanings arrayed side by side, but dimensions of the one word that reaches beyond the moment."⁴⁵ Where the *Catechism* refers to the theory of the four senses of Scripture developed by the Fathers and systematized in the Middle Ages, Ratzinger himself prefers to speak of the four dimensions of the meaning of the text.⁴⁶

In the first part of his trilogy, Ratzinger speaks positively about "canonical exegesis," according to which individual texts should be read in the context of the entire Scriptures. In addition, he also refers to the other two guidelines for theological interpretation mentioned in DV 12: the living Tradition of the whole Church and the analogy of faith, or, as Ratzinger prefers to call it, internal analogies in faith.⁴⁷ As for canonical exegesis, "[i]t does not contradict historical-critical interpretation, but carries it forward in an organic way toward becoming theology in the proper sense."⁴⁸ This follows from what has been said above: from the unity of *historia salutis* and from the nature of the human word, capable of expressing the word of God in new ways:

Older texts are reappropriated, reinterpreted, and read with new eyes in new contexts. . . . This is a process in which the word gradually unfolds its inner potentialities, already somehow present like seeds, but needing the challenge of new situations, new experiences, and new sufferings in order to open up.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xx. Cf. Heereman, "Joseph Ratzinger's Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis," 109.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, "Current Doctrinal Relevance." Cf. Gaál, *The Theology of Pope*, 117; Ramage, *Dark Passages*, 61; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 109. Scigliano Jr. expresses the opinion that Benedict XVI is interested in recovering the tradition of the four senses insofar as all the senses are manifestations of a single Christological sense – cf. Scigliano Jr., "Pope Benedict XVI's Jesus," 177.

⁴⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xviii. Cf. Farkasfalvy, "Jesus of Nazareth," 441.

⁴⁸ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xix. Cf. Crimella, "Hermeneutical and Exegetical," 127; Kereszty, "The Challenge of Jesus of Nazareth For Theologians," 463.

⁴⁹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xviii–xix.

The value of canonical exegesis not only allows us to read the previously hidden potential of the written word, but also determines our understanding of the literal (historical) sense itself.⁵⁰ As Anthony C. Sciglitano Jr. aptly notes:

Benedict holds to a rule-governed hermeneutic, whose central rule is holistic reading of the parts of the Bible in the context of the whole canon, as the canon is defined and understood by a determinate faith community. Without the rule-governed and unified vision that this hermeneutic grants, a “literal” interpretation can operate capriciously and arbitrarily by reading biblical passages in isolation from their full canonical context.⁵¹

According to Ratzinger, a given biblical text should first be interpreted in its historical context, already assuming God’s active role in history, and then read in the light of the entire historical movement with the central event of Christ. He recognizes that the Fathers and the Middle Ages lacked the first step, which made the second be arbitrary, and that contemporary scientific exegesis lacks the second step, which also renders the first meaningless, and paradoxically, methodological arbitrariness appears at the first step.⁵²

The development of historical consciousness considered the assumption of patristic exegesis that pre-Christian authors pointed to Christ to be ahistorical.⁵³ However, Ratzinger insists that “[t]he recognition of the multidimensional nature of human language, not staying fixed to a particular moment in history, but having a hold on the future,” helps in “understanding of how the Word of

⁵⁰ Cf. Benedykt XVI, “Dialog chrześcijańsko-muzułmański,” trans. Adam Błyszcz, in *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo?: Testament duchowy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2023), 58–59: “From a Christian perspective, only in terms of the New Testament can we establish what the lasting theological significance of the Old Testament is.”

⁵¹ Sciglitano Jr., “Pope Benedict XVI’s Jesus,” 163.

⁵² Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 25; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 108. Cf. an interesting observation in Olivier-Thomas Venard, *A Poetic Christ: Thomist Reflections on Scripture, Language and Reality*, trans. Kenneth Oakes and Francesca Aran Murphy, Illuminating Modernity (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 7: “A new kind of allegorism seems to be at work here. This allegorism is no longer vertical like that of the Fathers, who at times overly harmonized and unified textual elements around Christ’s divinity, but seems to be a horizontal one: scholars extrapolate from the text to the historical reality through a type of homothetic imagination which moves from the signifier on the page to the referent in history.”

⁵³ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Preface,” in *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, by Pontifical Biblical Commission (2001), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html#PREFACE.

God can avail of the human word to confer on a history in progress a meaning that surpasses the present moment and yet brings out, precisely in this way, the unity of the whole." Christian hermeneutics of the Old Testament, Ratzinger maintains, following the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, although it differs from Jewish hermeneutics, "corresponds nevertheless to a potentiality of meaning effectively present in the texts."⁵⁴

As the author of *Jesus of Nazareth* wrote, the words of the Old Testament awaited the true owner of the texts.⁵⁵ Christological reading is, one might say, another rereading of the Old Testament in the light of the culminating historical and spiritual experience, and is "fully in line with its own architecture: At this new and decisive turning point in history, it is as if a veil has fallen from the words – through Jesus, they reveal new senses and take on a new context, shedding unexpected light."⁵⁶

Ratzinger justifies his conviction by arguing that the words of Scripture are based on the experience of "revelation" transcending the hagiographer's experience. When God speaks in human words, there is an inadequacy of the word in relation to its origin. Thus, the text can say more than the human author intended to say. Ratzinger refers to this as "exceeding" the historical *locus* of the text, opening the word to a new interpretation in a new historical setting and within new webs of meaning.⁵⁷ This, in turn, requires recognition of the role of

⁵⁴ Ratzinger. Cf. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 104; Farkasfalvy, "Jesus of Nazareth," 441.

⁵⁵ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Image Books, 2012), 17–18.

⁵⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, "Jedność wiary a pluralizm teologiczny: Wprowadzenie i komentarz do tez I–VIII i X–XII Międzynarodowej Komisji Teologicznej," in *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji: Teologiczna nauka o zasadach*, ed. Krzysztof Góźdż and Marzena Górecka, trans. Jarosław Merecki, vol. 1, *Opera Omnia* 9.1 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018), 152.

⁵⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation," 26–27; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, *Od teologii objawienia do teologii natchnienia: Studium inspirowane twórczością Geralda O'Collinsa i Josepha Ratzingera* (Lublin: Academicon, 2022), 178, 181, 325, 624, <https://doi.org/10.52097/acapress.9788362475919>. Ratzinger refers here to the patristic and medieval understanding of Revelation – cf. e.g.: Joseph Ratzinger, "The Question of the Concept of Tradition: A Provisional Response," in *In God's Word: Scripture – Tradition – Office*, ed. Peter Hünermann and Thomas Söding, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2008), 51; Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 458, 460. Cf. also Rudolf Voderholzer, "Revelation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Ratzinger*, ed. Daniel Cardó and Uwe Michael Lang, *Cambridge Companions to Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 84–85; Pidet, "Joseph Ratzinger," 316.

the People of God, viewed diachronically, as the place of understanding Scripture and the bridge between the “yesterday” and “today” of the word of God.⁵⁸

The Unity of God’s Plan and the Christological Unity of Scripture

Ratzinger claims, drawing on the *Catechism* that Scripture, although composed of various books, is one because of the unity of God’s plan, whose center and heart (cf. Ps 22:15), opened by Passover (cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–46), is Jesus Christ.⁵⁹ The Cardinal also quotes a passage from Thomas Aquinas’ biblical lecture, cited in the *Catechism* (no. 112): “The phrase ‘heart of Christ’ can refer to Sacred Scripture, which makes known his heart, closed before the Passion, as the Scripture was obscure. But the Scripture has been opened since the Passion; since those who from then on have understood it, consider and discern in what way the prophecies must be interpreted.”⁶⁰ However, where Aquinas recognizes Christ in the words of Ps 22 in a literal sense,⁶¹ Ratzinger points rather to the previously emphasized potentiality of the word, which reveals its full sense only in the light of Christ’s event. Crucified, continuing the filial dialogue with the Father, he prays with the song of the persecuted righteous man and thus transforms prayer and reveals himself as the one who utters this Psalm. This word, incorporated into his death, became flesh and revealed its sense.⁶²

In Ratzinger’s view, the principle of the comprehensibility of history and its unity is the event of Christ.⁶³ This means “that the deeds that occurred in

⁵⁸ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Przedmowa do Joseph Ratzinger, *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit*, Freiburg 1989,” in *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji: Teologiczna nauka o zasadach*, ed. Krzysztof Góźdź and Marzena Górecka, trans. Jarosław Merecki, vol. 2, *Opera Omnia* 9.2 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018), 692; Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 29; Kevin E. O’Reilly, “The Theological Hermeneutics of St. Thomas and Benedict XVI,” *Angelicum* 97, no. 1 (2020): 61.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance”; CCC 112. Cf. also Ramage, *Dark Passages*, 54: “... a unity underlies the development and diversity within scripture that came about as a result of the divine pedagogy.”

⁶⁰ Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance.” Cf. Thomas de Aquino, *In Psalms Davidis expositio*, 21, n. 11, vol. 14 of *Opera omnia*, ed. Raffaele Cai (Parmae: Typis Petri Fiaccadori, 1863), 148–312 (hereafter: *In Ps.*).

⁶¹ I will discuss the comparison of Aquinas’ and Ratzinger’s interpretations of Ps 22 in a separate article.

⁶² See Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 144.

⁶³ Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 24; Maximino Arias Reyero, *Thomas von Aquin als Exeget: Die prinzipien seiner Schriftdeutung und seine Lehre von den Schriftsinnem* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1971), 85, 102, 106–7.

the Old Testament have their basis in a future deed in light of which it first becomes possible to understand them correctly.”⁶⁴ Therefore, in the interpretation of Scripture, “[t]he principle of discontinuity must therefore yield to the principle of the *analogia Scripturae* that emerges from the intrinsic claim of the biblical text itself; the principle of mechanism must give way to a principle of teleology.”⁶⁵ However, it is worth emphasizing that for Ratzinger, it is not only the goal that matters, but also the individual stages of salvation history. Christological hermeneutics presupposes faith and its connection with history.⁶⁶ As the author of *Jesus of Nazareth* emphasizes, “. . . this act of faith is based upon reason – historical reason – and so makes it possible to see the internal unity of Scripture. By the same token, it enables us to understand anew the individual elements that have shaped it, without robbing them of their historical originality.”⁶⁷ Thus, the literal sense is not identical to the historical sense discovered by the historical-critical method, unless the latter has become theological.

Ratzinger’s work also features a typological, or more precisely, Christological interpretation of the Old Testament. In 1979, Ratzinger noted that the author of the Letter to the Ephesians perceived Jesus as the mystery of the Torah, or the Bible of Israel.⁶⁸ These words and events are “symbolic references to Christ,” and “translated into Latin, this means: Scripture as a whole is *sacramentum*.” In the “interpretation of Scripture” by the apostle of the nations, “three types of *sacramenta* appear, namely, word sacraments, event sacraments, and creation sacraments.”⁶⁹ Individual words of Scripture in the Pauline language are types

⁶⁴ Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 24. Cf. Arias Reyero, *Thomas von Aquin als Exeget*, 102, 246–47.

⁶⁵ Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 25.

⁶⁶ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xix. See also Ilesanmi G. Ajibola, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Theological Hermeneutics for Christians’ Faith Enhancement: An Appraisal,” *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 5, no. 2 (2015): 107; Blanco-Sarto, “Catholics and Lutherans,” 55.

⁶⁷ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xix.

⁶⁸ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” in *Teologia liturgii: Sakramentalne podstawy życia chrześcijańskiego*, ed. Krzysztof Góźdż and Małgorzata Górecka, trans. Wiesław Szymona, Opera Omnia 11 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 209–10.

⁶⁹ Ratzinger, 210. Cf. also VD 13 (“we can contemplate the profound unity in Christ between creation, the new creation and all salvation history. . . . He is the center of the cosmos and of history . . .”); Staudt, “Reality and Sign,” 342, 354. Bonaventure, whose work Ratzinger studied, believed that one should move from the “letter” to the “spirit” not only of Scripture but also of creation – cf. Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 84–85. Krzysztof Porosło wrote about the sacramentality of creation in Ratzinger’s thought: Krzysztof Porosło, “Sacramentality in the Perspective of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI,” *Collectanea Theologica* 93, no. 4 (2023): 62–66, <https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2023.93.4.06>.

of the One who was to come (Greek: *typoi tou mellontos*), sacraments of the Coming One (Latin: *sacramentum futuri*). Ratzinger noted that for the Church Fathers, the word *typos* coincided even more closely with *mystērion – sacramentum*. Christological interpretation is essentially identical with typological interpretation.⁷⁰

Ratzinger linked this interpretation of Scripture with the Catholic concept of *sacramentum*, and argued that when the connection between the word and the sacrament is no longer recognized, the correct interpretation of the New Testament as a Christological reading of the Old Testament is lost. Those who deny the Christological understanding of the Old Testament must understand it only literally, and in that case they also reject the New Testament. In modern times, there has been a shift away from typological reading in favor of a literary-historical interpretation focused on the original, oldest meaning of the texts. In this situation, the concept of the sacrament, reflecting the transition between the Old and New Testaments, also loses its basis.⁷¹

The transition from promise and preparation to fulfilment and presence⁷² means that the “New Testament are no longer simply *sacra menta futuri*, outlines of what is to come, but are, rather, representations of the present, the expression and fruit of the actual life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The Old Testament *sacra menta futuri* were a movement toward a future that they themselves were not. With the coming of Christ and his Passover, the expected reality became present, “a sacrament now is the representation of the given, a transfer to what has already happened.”⁷³ As Hahn notes in his publication

⁷⁰ Cf. Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” 210–11. Cf. also Porosło, “Sacramentality,” 59; Staudt, “Reality and Sign,” 352: “The unity of Scripture in Christ can be seen especially in typology.”

⁷¹ Cf. Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” 211–13. Cf. Benedykt XVI, “O znaczeniu komunii,” trans. Robert Skrzypczak, in *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo?: Testament duchowy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2023), 194: “... exegesis that seeks to be rigidly historical confines the Old Testament to the past and does not have the tools to explain the dynamic of the passageways through which the past opens up into the present and the future.”

⁷² Cf. Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” 213; VD 41; Benedykt XVI, “Łaska i powołanie bez nawrócenia,” trans. Robert Skrzypczak, in *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo?: Testament duchowy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2023), 79: “The whole Old Testament is now thought of as prophecy, as a *sacramentum futuri*. . . . This entails a dynamic approach to the Old Testament in which the texts are not to be read statically in themselves, but must be understood as part of the whole, as a movement forward toward Christ.”

⁷³ Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” 213–14. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Teologia liturgii,” in *Teologia liturgii: Sakramentalne podstawy życia chrześcijańskiego*, ed. Krzysztof Góźdz and Małgorzata Górecka, trans. Wiesław Szymona, Opera Omnia 11 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 614: “. . . the ancient worship, with its substitutes and its often tragic

devoted to Ratzinger's thought, "the New Testament's typological interpretation of the Old is ordered to the sacramental encounter with Christ," and the ecclesiastical "typological reading tends toward mystagogy, toward bringing about a kind of communion with the events proclaimed in the sacred pages."⁷⁴

From this perspective, Benedict XVI's statements in the exhortation *Verbum Domini* are understandable. In them, the Pope recalled that Christian exegesis seeks to discover the spiritual sense, that is, "the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it." Since this context that constitutes the fulfilment of Scripture exists, "[i]t is therefore quite acceptable to re-read the Scriptures in the light of this new context, which is that of life in the Spirit" (VD 37).⁷⁵ This is in harmony with the Catholic belief that the Christian faith is not a "religion of the Book," because at its center is the Person of Jesus Christ as the living Word of God, who interprets himself in the words of Scripture that can only be understood in a living relationship with him.⁷⁶

Tension in the Unity Between the Old and New Testaments

In the preface to the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Ratzinger recalled that for the Church Fathers, the central theme was the question of the internal unity of the Bible, composed of the Old and New Testaments. For the faith of the Church, it was of fundamental importance to read the Bible of Israel in a way that recognized its transparency to Christ and thus to the Logos as the voice of wisdom coming from God. Ultimately, it was not rabbinical methods or Greek allegory, as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith emphasized, but the New Testament itself – and earlier, Jesus of Nazareth, claiming the binding interpretation of "Scripture"

misunderstandings, comes to an end because the reality itself is manifested, the new Temple: the risen Christ who draws us to himself, transforms us, and unites us."

⁷⁴ Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 176–77.

⁷⁵ This is the definition given by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in: Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, II, B, 2. Benedict XVI, however, cautions that in applying typology, "we must not forget that the Old Testament retains its own inherent value as revelation, as our Lord himself reaffirmed (cf. *Mk* 12:29–31)." (VD 41).

⁷⁶ Cf. Ratzinger, "Current Doctrinal Relevance"; CCC 108. Cf. Benedict XVI, "Dialog chrześcijańsko-muzułmański," 59; Ramage, *Dark Passages*, 65.

(cf. Mark 1:22; Luke 24:27) – constitutes the foundation of Christian exegesis.⁷⁷ It can therefore be said that “the Fathers of the Church created nothing new when they gave a Christological interpretation to the Old Testament; they only developed and systematized what they themselves had already discovered in the New Testament.”⁷⁸

The resurrection of Christ from the dead proved decisive for Christian reading, when God sided with Jesus and his interpretation of the Old Testament. Therefore, the Church also read the Old Testament as focused on the Risen One, which meant the pneumatization (spiritualization) of scriptures and their liberation from political and legal connections.⁷⁹ “It was therefore evident to Christians that the preaching of Jesus Christ, his death and Resurrection, signified the God-given turning point of time, and consequently the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures in light of Jesus Christ was, so to speak, legitimized by God himself.”⁸⁰ Due to the complexity of the Old Testament, its Christological interpretation in the New Testament writings is diversely-one perception of God’s words from the perspective of the final word of God.⁸¹

In 1973, in his text *Jedność wiary a pluralizm teologiczny* [Unity of Faith and Theological Pluralism], Ratzinger advocated maintaining the “unity through diversity” of both testaments. Rejecting Marcion’s division between the two testaments, and thus also between the Creator and the Savior, allows for the ontological interpretation of the figure of Jesus to be preserved. Conversely, the division between the Old and New Testaments places Jesus in opposition to being (creation), and then religion becomes a revolution (becoming opposed to being), modeled on Old Testament political salvation that can be realized in history. This would be tantamount to agreeing with Jesus’ opponents in his trial.⁸² To quote Ratzinger:

⁷⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, “Preface.” See also Benedykt XVI, “Łaska i powołanie bez nawrócenia,” 94; Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 102, 116; Przemysław Przyślak, “Benedict XVI in Dialogue with Judaism,” in *Postscripta: The Voice of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on Current Challenges for Theology and the Church*, ed. Bogdan Ferdek and Julian Nastalek (Wrocław: Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław, 2022), 147–48.

⁷⁸ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 16.

⁷⁹ Cf. Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary,” 152–53. See also Benedykt XVI, “Benedykt XVI – Arie Folger: Wymiana korespondencji sierpień–wrzesień 2018,” trans. Robert Skrzypczak, in *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo?: Testament duchowy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2023), 109–19.

⁸⁰ Benedict XVI, “Łaska i powołanie bez nawrócenia,” 78.

⁸¹ Cf. Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary,” 152–53.

⁸² Cf. Ratzinger, 156–57; Scigliano Jr., “Pope Benedict XVI’s Jesus,” 172.

In both cases, we are dealing with uniformity: only the Old Testament or only the New Testament applies. Rejecting the unity in the diversity of the Old and New Testaments distorts the whole. This unity, whose tension must be maintained, means that Jesus and the Creator are one, that being belongs to Jesus, not only history: ontology belongs to faith, which is based on the unity of the Testaments.⁸³

This tension (unity and diversity of testaments) is of colossal importance for understanding the senses of Scripture. For it means that “we must reject . . . a naive, directly Christological interpretation of the Old Testament, which seeks to transfer Christology directly to the letter of the Old Testament, and thus misses both the reality of history and the dynamics that lead beyond the letter of faith.” In other words, it denies the previously emphasized connection between salvation history, the authorship of Scripture, and the multidimensionality of language. By leading us to dwell on literalism, it depreciates the spiritual tension of Revelation. “It is therefore necessary,” Ratzinger concludes, “to maintain the tension of the Old Testament in its openness to the New Testament: the essential form of the apostolic witness to Christ can only be preserved in the indelible connection between the letter and the spirit, and not in the literalness of the letter.”⁸⁴

A similar view was already evident in the comments of the young theologian as a council advisor. Ratzinger believed that in the *Defontibus revelationis* schema, the statement about the authority of the Old Testament in justifying the Christian religion expresses both too little (parts of the Old Testament belong to the past and do not play a role in justifying the Christian religion) and too much (other parts remain relevant as directly Christian). However, following the New Testament, it should be accepted that not only individual passages, but the entire Old Testament speaks of Christ and therefore can constitute the justification and foundation of the Christian religion, even if it is only in Christ that it becomes clear how the Old Testament had its foundation in him and how it pointed to him.⁸⁵ Pidel adds that only in relation to the One who

⁸³ Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary,” 157. Robert Woźniak shows that in Ratzinger’s hermeneutics, not only the theological but also the metaphysical dimension of the word of God is important – cf. Robert J. Woźniak, “Mutuality of Scripture, Metaphysics and Dogmatics: A Basic Hermeneutical Insight in Pope Benedict XVI’s Jesus of Nazareth,” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 200, 212, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.17657>.

⁸⁴ Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary,” 157–58.

⁸⁵ Cf. Jared Wicks, “Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus Before and During Vatican Council II,” *Gregorianum* 89, no. 2 (2008): 282–83; Voderholzer, “Revelation,” 88–89.

removes the veil from the face (cf. 2 Cor 3:12–18) do the individual parts of the Old Testament undergo a “Christological transformation.”⁸⁶

Ratzinger also recalled the conviction of the Church Fathers: “I can embrace the entire Old Testament without being bound to each letter because every word is a precursor of Christ, and naturally the precursor is surpassed yet is my own if I am with Christ himself.”⁸⁷ The abandonment of typological and sacramental categories in exegesis, according to Ratzinger, results in either the Old Testament being removed from the Christian canon or its literal sense being accepted. Alternatively, as Luther did, in understanding the relationship between the Law and the Gospel dialectically.⁸⁸ The Catholic approach emphasizes a specific relationship between the sacrament and Scripture, which should be read “with a view to its totality and unity, in the discrepancy and unity of promise and fulfillment.”⁸⁹

In Ratzinger’s view, the unity of both testaments must be maintained, while at the same time emphasizing the “leap” from the Old to the New Covenant if *historia salutis* is to be respected.

The fundamental form of unity through diversity of the Old and New Testaments certainly precludes any simple identification; however, it also excludes any discontinuity that breaks history down into a sum of isolated acts of God. . . . Therefore, on the one hand, the New Testament is indeed “new”; it is not a mere extrapolation of the sum of what was before, but is truly a new act of God. On the other hand, the “New” Testament contains the Old and proves to be the means by which everything that had been hitherto finds its proper place and sense.⁹⁰

Christological-Pneumatological Interpretation and the Incarnation

Benedict XVI recognizes that in recreating the interplay between the senses of Scripture it is essential to grasp the transition from the letter to the spirit. This passage is not automatic and spontaneous, “. . . the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text.” Transcending the letter “involves a progression and a process of understanding guided by the inner movement of the whole corpus, and hence it also has to become a vital process . . . , demanding

⁸⁶ See Pidel, “Joseph Ratzinger,” 315.

⁸⁷ Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” 216.

⁸⁸ See Ratzinger, 216–17.

⁸⁹ Ratzinger, 218. See also Ramage, *Dark Passages*, 62.

⁹⁰ Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary,” 158–59.

full engagement in the life of the Church, which is life ‘according to the Spirit’ (*Gal 5:16*)” (VD 38).⁹¹

Importantly, this process of rising from the letter to the spirit, accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit, is also connected with the freedom of the exegete. The Apostle Paul wrote that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (*2 Cor 3:6*) and that “The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (*2 Cor 3:17*). As Benedict XVI adds, “[t]he Spirit of freedom is not simply the exegete’s own idea, the exegete’s own vision. The Spirit is Christ, and Christ is the Lord who shows us the way” (VD 38).⁹²

As a theologian, Ratzinger emphasized the different forms of Revelation in the Old and New Covenants and the resulting different forms of Scripture in both covenants. The authors of the New Testament do not contrast the “Scriptures” of the Old Testament with the new writings, but with the event of Christ as the spirit interpreting these writings (Paul’s *gramma* and *pneuma*). It is the Lord as Spirit who is the sense and the true, living, and not merely literal, content of Scripture (cf. *2 Cor 3:14–18*).⁹³ As N. S. Heereman notes, this passage is the methodological foundation for Ratzinger’s Christological-pneumatological exegesis.⁹⁴

Ratzinger preferred the term Christological-pneumatological interpretation. Admittedly, it could be “called ‘allegorical’ from a historical-literary perspective,” but “on the other hand, it plainly illustrates the profound novelty and the clear motivation of the new Christian interpretation of the Old Testament.” In this kind of reading, “allegory is not a literary expedient so as to make the text applicable to new purposes but, rather, the expression of a historical transition that corresponds to the internal logic of the text.”⁹⁵ It is the coming of Christ and the sending of the Spirit, or, in other words, the presence of the Risen One

⁹¹ See also VD 29–30.

⁹² Cf. VD 29: “... Saint Thomas Aquinas, citing Saint Augustine, insists that ‘the letter, even that of the Gospel, would kill, were there not the inward grace of healing faith’” (quoted in *ST*, Ia–IIa, q. 106, art. 2.). Cf. also Ratzinger, “Question of the Concept,” 53.

⁹³ Cf. Ratzinger, 54. Cf. also Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 106–7, 116; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 51–52. In *Verbum Domini* (no. 39), Benedict XVI recalls that in the New Testament, the “Scriptures” (cf. Matt 21:43; John 5:39; Rom 1:2; 2 Pet 3:16) as a whole are treated as the sole word of God—it is Christ who gives unity to all the “Scriptures.”

⁹⁴ Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 106.

⁹⁵ Benedykt XVI, “Katolickie kapłaństwo,” trans. Robert Skrzypczak, in *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo?: Testament duchowy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2023), 154. Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, 183–85; Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, 51–52; Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 102.

in the Church through his Spirit, that makes it possible to read the Law and the Prophets in the light of God's final self-revelation.⁹⁶ Therefore, the Old Testament cannot be confined to literal exegesis,

but can only have a continuing existence within the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ, who remains with his own every day until the end of the world (Mt 28:20), who through his going away in and through the Cross has come again in the Holy Spirit (as John explains it) and, through the Spirit, reveals to the disciples what they would once have been unable to bear, when the Lord was still visibly dwelling among them (Jn 16:12f.).⁹⁷

In Ratzinger's opinion, the "spiritualization" of the Old Testament (its spiritual universalization) refers to the Lord who is Spirit (= to the Risen One).⁹⁸ Ratzinger emphasizes that "the 'spiritualization' experienced by the Old Testament is at the same time an 'incarnation' – the subordination of everything to the Spirit who dwells in the flesh of Jesus." Freedom does not mean subordination to general reason, but reading the Old Testament "together with the One who, through the Father, opened it to its deepest foundation and thus revealed its full realism. The letter was not liberated without any reference, but in reference to Him."⁹⁹ Preserving this incarnational character of pneumatization is possible because the reminding work of the Spirit is accomplished in the faith of the Church.¹⁰⁰

The German theologian provides Martin Luther's rejection of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist as an example of a misunderstanding of the relationship between the two testaments, or more precisely, between historical events and the present reality of the Church.¹⁰¹ Ratzinger pointed out that the Paschal Mystery, in which the Jewish Passover received its new sense, although it occurred in history, at the same time transcends it and can therefore be present throughout history. Christ's sacrifice does not belong to the past; in the community of the Church, it is contemporary to believers.¹⁰² According to Ratzinger, problems

⁹⁶ Heereman, 117.

⁹⁷ Ratzinger, "The Question of the Concept," 56.

⁹⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, "Jedność wiary," 155.

⁹⁹ Ratzinger, 156. Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 98–99 (on Christ's freedom and at the same time fidelity to the letter of Scripture).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ratzinger, "Jedność wiary," 155–56.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Ratzinger, "Teologia liturgii," 607.

¹⁰² Cf. Ratzinger, 608–9, 616. Cf. also Joseph Ratzinger, "Duch liturgii," in *Teologia liturgii: Sakramentalne podstawy życia chrześcijańskiego*, ed. Krzysztof Góźdż and Marzena Górecka, trans. Wiesław Szymona, Opera Omnia 11 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 98–99.

with recognizing the priesthood also stem from erroneous assumptions: Luther's fundamental decisions (the dualism of Law and grace) and the characteristics of the historical-critical method constitute a barrier to recognizing the continuity between the two testaments. Only a Christological-pneumatological interpretation of the Old Testament, seeing it as a path to Christ, allows us to see the ministries in the Church in their connection with the ministries related to the Law of Moses (*episkopos* = high priest, *presbyteros* = priest, *diakonos* = Levite), and thus affirm their priestly character, according to Benedict XVI.¹⁰³

Interestingly, Ratzinger also sees in certain beliefs of Thomas Aquinas an expression of an incorrect understanding of the relationship between the testaments – he criticizes the one-sided spiritualization of the Old Testament. In his essay on church music, he noted that Aquinas, although he recognized that synagogue singing had been transferred to the Church by Jesus and the apostles, following tradition, opted for the exclusively vocal nature of church music, because, in his opinion, musical instruments would create the appearance of a return to Judaism. Ratzinger believed that a spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament came at the cost of denying the theological significance of the literal sense as having no value for Christians.¹⁰⁴ Ratzinger sees in this approach an echo of the Platonic opposition between what is sensual (music, especially instrumental) and spiritual (word).¹⁰⁵ According to Ratzinger, the source of the Church Fathers' hostile attitude towards music was primarily "a one-sidedly 'spiritual' understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, between law and gospel."¹⁰⁶

Ratzinger maintains that "to christianize the Old Testament is not simply to spiritualize it: it also implies incarnation."¹⁰⁷ Spiritualization must also include what has been created, including the human physicality and the sensual element. Christian spiritualization remains a striving to encounter the Lord, who is Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:17; 1 Cor 15:45) as the One whose body was enveloped by the life-giving power of the Spirit.¹⁰⁸ The difference between the Christian and Platonic approaches is therefore determined by Christology, and "its background is the

¹⁰³ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Katolickie kapłaństwo," 145, 154–56.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "Teologiczne fundamenty muzyki kościelnej," in *Teologia liturgii: Sakramentalne podstawy życia chrześcijańskiego*, ed. Krzysztof Góźdż and Marzena Górecka, trans. Wiesław Szymona, Opera Omnia 11 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 473–76, 488; *ST* II–II, q. 91, a. 1–2 (esp. a. 1, ad. 2, and a. 2, ad. 4).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, 476–77.

¹⁰⁶ Ratzinger, "Teologiczne fundamenty," 477.

¹⁰⁷ Ratzinger, 478.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, 478–79, 487.

theology of creation, whose inner unity is not destroyed but ratified by Christology.”¹⁰⁹ The process of spiritualization of the Old Testament “is understood properly as bringing creation into the mode of being of the Holy Spirit and its consequent transformation, exemplified in the crucified and resurrected Christ.”¹¹⁰

Thomas Aquinas on Literal and Spiritual Senses

The Interrelation Between Spiritual Sense and Literal Sense

The division into literal and spiritual senses is determined by the manner of signifying, which the author of *the Summa* explains as follows:

The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things [*voces significant res*] belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal [*sensus historicus vel litteralis*]. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification [*res significatae per voces, iterum res alias significant*] is called the spiritual sense [*sensus spiritualis*], which is based on the literal, and presupposes it [*qui super litteralem fundatur, et eum supponit*].¹¹¹

The last sentence emphasizes that reaching the spiritual sense is conditioned by interpreting reality as a figure of another reality. In addition, the primacy of the literal sense is linked to its unambiguity, which better serves to reveal what is necessary for human salvation.¹¹² It is also important that “. . . St Thomas recognises as true senses, intended by God, the literal and the spiritual senses of Scripture . . .”¹¹³ It is not a question of two parallel paths of interpretation, but

¹⁰⁹ Ratzinger, 479.

¹¹⁰ Ratzinger, 487.

¹¹¹ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 10, resp. Cf. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones de quolibet*, VII, q. 6, a. 1, resp., *Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. Edita*, 24.1–2 (Rome: Commissio Leonina; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1996) (hereafter: *Quodl.*); Thomas de Aquino, “*Super Epistolam ad Galatas lectura*,” cap. 4, lect. 7, n. 254, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 1 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953) (hereafter: *In Gal.*).

¹¹² Cf. Ignacio M. Manresa Lamarca, “The Literal Sense and the Spiritual Understanding of Scripture According to St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 10, no. 3 (2017): 350, 369, <https://doi.org/10.12775/bpth.2017.018>.

¹¹³ Manresa Lamarca, 351.

of the literal sense developing into spiritual senses.¹¹⁴ *Sensus spiritualis* remains inseparably linked to the literal sense: “is always founded upon the literal and proceeds from it [*semper fundatur super litteralem et procedit ex eo*].”¹¹⁵

Aquinas justifies the spiritual sense with God’s authorship of the Holy Scriptures and God’s providence governing all matters and events towards an end.¹¹⁶ The divine Author of the Holy Scriptures causes that

the things running their course signify something else [*res cursum suum pergentes aliquid aliud significant*], which is understood through a spiritual sense. Yet to order things in their course [*ordinare res in cursu suo*] that from them such a signification can be understood belongs to him alone who by his providence governs things [*qui sua providentia res gubernat*], who alone is God.¹¹⁷

As Mary Healy put it, “whereas human beings write with words, God writes with history,” acting according to a pattern whereby “the persons, objects, institutions, and events of the old covenant, interpreted properly, point forward to and illuminate the culmination of his plan in Christ.”¹¹⁸

Jeremy Holmes lists the necessary factors that determine the existence of spiritual sense: “(1) one reality must bear a likeness to another; (2) the signifying reality must have its own proper functions and place in the flow of history aside from being a sign; (3) the likeness of the one reality to the other must

¹¹⁴ Cf. Piotr Roszak, “Aquinas in Protestant Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Cauriensia* 18 (2024): 354, <https://doi.org/10.17398/2340-4256.18.351>; Piotr Roszak, “Biblical Exegesis and Theology in Thomas Aquinas: Understanding the Background of Biblical Thomism,” *Studium: Filosofia y Teología* 24, no. 48 (2021): 18.

¹¹⁵ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 1, ad. 1.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Quodl.* XII, q. 3, a. 1, resp. John Webster, referring to Thomas’s understanding of providence, maintained that God in his providence caused biblical texts to serve his self-revelation – cf. John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury – T & T Clark, 2012), 15.

¹¹⁷ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 3, resp. Cf. Leo J. Elders, “Aquinas on Holy Scripture as Medium of Divine Revelation,” in *La Doctrine de la révélation divine de saint Thomas d’Aquin: Actes du Symposium sur la pensée de saint Thomas d’Aquin, tenu à Rolduc, les 4 et 5 novembre 1989*, ed. Leo J. Elders, *Studi tomistici* 37 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), 144–45; Thomas Prügl, “Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Joseph Wawrykow and Rik van Nieuwenhove (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), 393–94.

¹¹⁸ Mary Healy, “Aquinas’s Use of the Old Testament in His Commentary on Romans,” in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 188.

be ordained by the divine will to signify the other.”¹¹⁹ *Magister in sacra pagina* emphasizes both the factuality of Old Testament stories (literal sense) and their signifying function (figurative sense).¹²⁰ In the commentary on 1 Cor 10:6, 11, Aquinas writes that all “**these things were done in a figure of us**, not invented, but truly done,”¹²¹ and “**happened to them in figure**, of us that is: for that was the time of figures.”¹²²

Aquinas’ approach assumes a different understanding of history; different from the modern one, but consistent with the biblical message. Matthew Levering writes about the linear and participatory dimensions of history, which has its share in God’s providence, understood both metaphysically and Christologically-pneumatologically.¹²³ And, importantly for understanding the relationship between literal and spiritual senses, “the participatory indwells the linear” and is incomprehensible outside of this linear dimension.¹²⁴ It is no coincidence that St Thomas writes that “Gregory says (*Moral. xx, 1*): *Holy Writ by the manner of its speech transcends every science, because in one and the same sentence, while it describes a fact, it reveals a mystery.*”¹²⁵

Understanding history in terms of participation, which was one of the distinguishing features of medieval hermeneutics, necessarily leads to a holistic reading of the Bible.¹²⁶ In his exegesis, *magister in sacra pagina* readily refers to other biblical passages (*exponere Bibliam biblice*) that are terminologically

¹¹⁹ Jeremy Holmes, “Participation and the Meaning of Scripture,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 107.

¹²⁰ Cf. *ST I-II*, q. 102, a. 2, sed contra.

¹²¹ Thomas de Aquino, “Super primam Epistolam ad Corinthios lectura,” cap. 10, lect. 2, n. 523, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 1 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953) (hereafter: *In 1 Cor.*).

¹²² *In 1 Cor.*, cap. 10, lect. 2, n. 530.

¹²³ Cf. Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation*, Reading the Scriptures (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 1–3, 14, 16–17; Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the Gospel through Church and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 232–33, 244.

¹²⁴ Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 13.

¹²⁵ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 10, sed contra. Cf. *Quodl. VII*, q. 6, a. 3, sed contra. Cf. also Elisabeth Reinhardt, “Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture in the Light of His Inauguration Lectures,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 81.

¹²⁶ Cf. Piotr Roszak, “Tomizm biblijny: metoda i perspektywy,” *Biblica et Patristica Thourunensis* 9, no. 3 (2017): 123, <https://doi.org/10.12775/bpth.2016.024>; Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen, “Introduction,” in *Towards a Biblical Thomism: Thomas Aquinas and the Renewal of Biblical Theology*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2018), 15.

or theologically close and shed new light on the text being explained.¹²⁷ This belief in a kind of self-explanation of the Bible (*Scriptura sui interpres*) stems from Thomas Aquinas' serious treatment of the authorship of Scripture and the history of salvation guided by him.¹²⁸ As Christopher Seitz emphasizes, canonical reading is not a theological “violence” inflicted on historical sense in order to “appropriate” it for the Christian perspective.¹²⁹

If there is ongoing debate as to whether Aquinas allowed for multiple senses in the literal sense,¹³⁰ then surely the full depth of what God intended to convey in the written word of God can only be discovered through canonical reading. Aquinas' reading *per concordantiam*¹³¹ indicates that the human author could not have been aware of everything that can be read from a given passage. However, Aquinas expressed the conviction that “. . . nothing necessary to faith is contained under the spiritual sense which is not elsewhere put forward by the Scripture in its literal sense.”¹³²

¹²⁷ Cf. Reinhardt, “Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter,” 84; Piotr Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciel: U podstaw chrystologii soteriologicznej św. Tomasza z Akwinu w świetle Super Psalmos* (Poznań: W drodze; Warszawa: Instytut Tomistyczny, 2020), 49.

¹²⁸ See Piotr Roszak, “Między analizą a syntezą: Reguły egzegetyczne w Super Psalmos św. Tomasza z Akwinu,” in *Wykład Księgi Psalmów: Expositio in Psalmos Davidis*, by Tomasz z Akwinu, ed. Piotr Roszak, trans. Wiesław Dąbrowski (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2021), 18.

¹²⁹ Cf. Christopher R. Seitz, *The Character of Christian Scripture: The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 154.

¹³⁰ Opposed to this view are, among others, Elders (“Aquinas on Holy Scripture,” 148–49), following Mark F. Johnson (“Another Look at the Plurality of the Literal Sense,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 2 [1992]: 118–41) and Stephen E. Fowl (“The Importance of Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture: The Example of Thomas Aquinas,” in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam et al. [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006], 35–50).

¹³¹ On this practice, see Piotr Roszak, “Między analizą a syntezą,” 16–17.

¹³² ST I, q. 1, a. 10, ad. 1. Cf. *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 1, ad. 3. This statement should be nuanced—Thomas himself often refers to several passages and draws conclusions from them—this is the case, for example, in the two-stage apology of the doctrine of purgatory – cf. Zatwardnicki, “Thomas Aquinas’s Apology of the Doctrine of Purgatory,” *passim* (esp. 343).

Dual Authorship of Scripture

The main author (*Auctor principalis*) of Holy Scripture is God, while man remains a secondary, instrumental author (*auctor instrumentalis*).¹³³ Although the instrumentality of the hagiographer “must be qualified so as to exclude overly passive notions of instrumental agency,”¹³⁴ the causalities are not competitive, as they belong to different levels.¹³⁵ Aquinas was aware that the mind of a prophet is a fallible instrument [*mens prophetae est instrumentum deficiens*], which is why even a true prophet does not know everything, and does not even always know what the Holy Spirit intended to convey through him.¹³⁶ From the fact that God is the principal author, it follows that all the senses of Scripture are intended by God.¹³⁷

Therefore, spiritual sense does not lie on the human side of Scripture interpretation, but on the side of divine intention. Spiritual senses, as St Thomas writes in one of his quodlibets, can be found “only in that Scripture of which the Holy Spirit is author, whereas man is only an instrument, according to that line of the Psalmist: *my tongue the reed-pen of a scribe* (Ps 45:1 [44:2]).”¹³⁸ In his lecture on Ps 45(44), *magister in sacra pagina* writes that the Psalmist “first puts forward the writing of the psalm [*proponit editionem psalmi*], second, its end, at *I speak*; third, the author, at *my tongue* [*designat autorem, ibi, lingua*].”¹³⁹

In his commentary on the words “My tongue is the pen of a nimble scribe” (v. 2c), Thomas explains that “[h]ere is described the author of the psalm, the tongue [*Hic ponitur auctor psalmi qui est lingua*.]” It is as if the Psalmist were saying: “It should not be understood that I made this by myself, but by the help of the Holy Spirit, who used my tongue as a scribe uses a pen.” Therefore, “the principal author of this psalm is the Holy Spirit [*principalis auctor hujus*

¹³³ See Gilbert Dahan, “Thomas Aquinas: Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 47.

¹³⁴ Bernhard Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation in the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas,” in *Engaging Catholic Doctrine: Essays in Honor of Matthew Levering*, ed. Robert Barron, Scott W. Hahn, and James R. A. Merrick (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2023), 82.

¹³⁵ Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciels*, 121.

¹³⁶ Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 173, a. 4, resp.

¹³⁷ Cf. Albert Marie Surmanski, “The Literal Sense of Scripture in Albert and Aquinas’s Eucharistic Theology,” *Studium: Filosofia y Teología* 24, no. 48 (2021):45, <https://doi.org/10.53439/stdfyt48.24.2021.39-64>.

¹³⁸ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 3, resp.

¹³⁹ *In Ps.* 44, n. 451.

psalmi est Spiritus Sanctus]” (cf. 2 Sam 23:2; 2 Pet 1:21), who speaks through the inspired author “as through an instrument [*quasi per instrumentum*].”¹⁴⁰

The psalmist becomes the *stylus* “of *a scribe who writes swiftly*, the Holy Spirit who writes swiftly in the heart of man.” Unlike people who seek partial wisdom through long study, “[t]hose who possess knowledge through divine revelation [*Illi qui habent scientiam per revelationem divinam*] are filled with wisdom immediately, like those who are immediately filled with the Holy Spirit” (cf. Acts 2:2; Ps 147[146]:15; Ps 148:5).¹⁴¹ Interestingly, Thomas believes that the entire interpretation of the Psalm to date fits within the literal sense.¹⁴²

The commentator also provides a spiritual interpretation, referring to Dionysius (actually Pseudo-Dionysius). According to Thomas, “[f]irst, his emanation is described; second, his virtue, at *I speak*, third, his work, at *tongue*.¹⁴³ The psalmist would describe the procession of the Son from the Father as a kind of emanation out of the fullness of the divine nature (cf. John 3:35), as well as the manner of emanation – from the heart of the Father (cf. Ps 110[109]:3), that is, neither from nothing (*ex nullo = ex nihilo*), since the Son is not a creature, nor from another essence (*essentia*), because then the Son would be a God other than the Father. The psalmist would also point to the property of the one proceeding as the Word (cf. John 1:1) and his perfection as possessing the full goodness of the divinity (cf. Luke 18:19).¹⁴⁴

References to Ps 45(44) and Ps 110(109) also appear in St Thomas’ commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews. Commenting on Heb 1:5 (= Ps 2:7), Aquinas identifies the manner of origin of the Son, the uniqueness of his sonship, and its eternity.¹⁴⁵ As for the manner of origin, the commentator explains that God, being spirit (cf. John 4:24), does “not engender in a carnal way, but in a spiritual and intellectual way [*spiritualiter et intellectualiter*]. But the intellect, when it speaks, engenders a word, which is its concept [*quod est conceptus eius*].” St Thomas believes that “[c]onsequently, for the Father’s intellect to speak is to conceive the Word in his heart [*in corde verbum concipere*]” (cf. Ps 44:2; Job 33:14; Sir 24:5).¹⁴⁶ The uniqueness of sonship has its source in the fact that “it

¹⁴⁰ *In Ps. 44*, n. 451.

¹⁴¹ *In Ps. 44*, n. 451.

¹⁴² Cf. *In Ps. 44*, n. 451.

¹⁴³ *In Ps. 44*, n. 451.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *In Ps. 44*, n. 451.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Thomas de Aquino, “*Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos lectura*,” cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 49, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953), 125–61 (hereafter: *In Heb.*).

¹⁴⁶ *In Heb.* cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 49.

is his unique property to be the natural Son of God,” and those to whom the word of God was addressed are called sons of God (cf. John 10:35) only because “they partake of the word of God . . . ; but Christ is the Word itself [*Christus est ipsum verbum*].¹⁴⁷ Discussing eternity, Thomas points out that the juxtaposition of the past (“have I begotten”) and the present (“today”) expresses both the perfection of begetting (is always complete) and the begotten Son, and the fact that engendering is always going on (cf. Mic 5:2; Ps 109:3).¹⁴⁸

Returning to Psalm 45(44), Aquinas believes that verse 2b (“I sing”) reveals the virtue of Christ, because it means that the Father does everything through his Word (cf. John 1:3). The Son would therefore be the tongue of the Father and the pen of the writer (v. 2c).¹⁴⁹ “The operation of a tongue is that through it the wisdom of the heart is passed on to others,” and “the pen signifies that wisdom which is in the heart is passed on into sensible material, like parchment.” God speaks, explains *magister in sacra pagina*, “when he pours his wisdom into rational minds” (cf. Ps 85[84]:9), and this is called the word, “since through it comes every illumination” (cf. John 1:4). In turn, God writes, because “since he imprints the judgments of his wisdom in rational creatures” (cf. Rom 1:20; Sir 1:10). Ultimately, “the pen is the Word of God.”¹⁵⁰

Aquinas seems to suggest here an analogy between the eternal Word of God and the inspired word of God associated with it. On the one hand, the Son is the language of the Father, and on the other hand, the words of the Psalmist are also the language in which God speaks.¹⁵¹ Both senses, literal and spiritual, are part of the participation of the word of God in the Word of God, and therefore have a Christological reference. This could explain why medieval thinker see the Christological meaning of the Old Testament even where they do not make a spiritual (figurative) reading of a given passage.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *In Heb.* cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 49. Conversely, only God is truly Father – cf. Thomas de Aquino, “Super Epistolam ad Ephesios lectura,” cap. 3, lect. 4, n. 169, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953).

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *In Heb.* cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 49.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *In Ps.* 44, n. 451. Thomas defends the truth that the Father expressed himself and creation through the same Word in *Quodl.* IV, q. 4, a. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *In Ps.* 44, n. 451.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciels*, 117. Cf. also DV 13, which speaks of the analogy between the Incarnation and the expression of the word of God in human language.

Spiritual Things in the Form of Material Things

Biblical language must necessarily be analogical, as it refers to knowledge that exceeds the possibility of expression. The ultimate sense of Scripture will always be deeper and richer than any human author could comprehend (and express).¹⁵² On the other hand, it is precisely the poverty of human language that allows God to express himself through Scripture and draw to the revealed reality. Bernhard Blankenhorn points out that it is no coincidence that the thirteenth article of the twelfth question of *the Summa*, in which “Thomas’s primary concern . . . is the power and limits of biblical and theological language about God,” follows the discussion of the beatific vision and precedes the question concerning the names of God.¹⁵³ Earlier, Aquinas responded to the objection concerning the use of metaphors in Scripture that seem to be appropriate for the lowest (poetry) rather than the highest teaching (*sacra doctrina*).¹⁵⁴

Thomas believes that “[i]t is befitting Holy Scripture to put forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparisons with material things [*divina et spiritualia sub similitudine corporalium*]” or “under the likeness of material things [*sub metaphoris corporalium*],” because “all our knowledge originates from the senses.”¹⁵⁵ Not only is “[t]he ray of divine revelation [*radius divinae revelationis*] not extinguished by the sensible imagery wherewith it is veiled,” but in this way “raises them to the knowledge of truths; and through those to whom the revelation has been made others also may receive instruction in these matters.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² See Elders, “Aquinas on Holy Scripture,” 151.

¹⁵³ Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation,” 65 (paraphrase), 68 (quote).

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *STI*, q. 1, a. 9, vid. *Theology and poetry*, despite all their differences, have a certain common denominator, as pointed out by Dahan: they transcend the limits of human reason and therefore must go beyond rational language and use *modus poeticus*. This mode of expression includes metaphor, symbol, or what Thomas covers with the broader term *similitudo*—which, as the scholar points out, refers to comparison, analogy, or simply similarity – cf. Dahan, “Thomas Aquinas,” 64.

¹⁵⁵ *STI*, q. 1, a. 9, resp. Cf. Per Erik Persson, *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*, trans. Ross MacKenzie (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970), 58; Mauricio Beuchot, “Hermeneutics in Medieval Thought,” trans. Juan Tubert-Oklander, in *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (New York: Routledge, 2015), 30.

¹⁵⁶ *STI*, q. 1, a. 9, ad. 2. Cf. *STI*–II, q. 101, a. 2, resp. Thomas refers to Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, “De coelesti hierarchia,” I, 2, in *De coelesti hierarchia: De ecclesiastica hierarchia: De mystica theologia: Epistulae*, in *Corpus Dionysiacum*, ed. Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991).

Aquinas points out that “those things that are taught metaphorically in one part of Scripture, in other parts are taught more openly [*Unde ea quae in uno loco Scripturae traduntur sub metaphoris, in aliis locis expressius exponuntur*] . . .”¹⁵⁷ He also cites the arguments put forward by Dionysius (Pseudo-Dionysius), according to whom more common figures free the human mind from error in a more efficient way, better correspond to the knowledge of God in this life (we know rather what he is not than what he is), and also hide divine things from the unworthy.¹⁵⁸

The literal sense, as understood by Thomas, is not the literalist sense, but the sense signified by a particular “letter” of Scripture.¹⁵⁹ As the author of the *Summa* writes, “. . . the literal sense is that which the author intends [*quem auctor intendit*], and since the author of Holy Writ is God . . .”¹⁶⁰ The parabolic (figurative) sense was classified by Aquinas as literal sense, “for by words things are signified properly and figuratively [*per voces significatur aliquid proprie, et aliquid figurative*]”; in the latter case, it is not the figure, but what it represents that is the literal sense.¹⁶¹ The proper sense, adds Ignacio M. Manresa Lamarca, conveys the truth more clearly, but is abstract and less likely to inspire love, while figurative language is more touching, although it carries the risk of reducing the message to human proportions.¹⁶² *Modus parabolicus*, although it conveys the teaching in a form adapted to the recipient, requires further interpretation, which, although it concerns spiritual matters, will also be covered by the literal sense (Jesus explained the parables to his disciples in private).¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ *STI*, q. 1, a. 9, ad. 2. Cf. also Jean-Pierre Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, vol. 1 of *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 58; Persson, *Sacra Doctrina*, 57; Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciel*, 44.

¹⁵⁸ *STI*, q. 1, a. 9, ad. 3. Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, “De coelesti hierarchia,” II, 2 and II, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Bruno John Clifton, “Discerning the Literal Sense: Bringing together Biblical Scholarship and Dogmatic Theology,” *Nova et vetera*, English Edition 19, no. 1 (2021): 253, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2021.0012>. Ratzinger believed that even today “. . . the exegetical maxim of Thomas Aquinas is very much to the point: ‘The task of the good interpreter is not to consider words, but sense’” – Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 26 (internal citation from: *In Mt*, cap. 27, lect. 1, n. 2321).

¹⁶⁰ *STI*, q. 1, a. 10, resp.

¹⁶¹ *STI*, q. 1, a. 10, ad. 3. Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, “Saint Thomas and His Sources,” trans. David L. Augustine, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 4; Dahan, “Thomas Aquinas,” 61–62; Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciel*, 44; Beuchot, “Hermeneutics in Medieval Thought,” 30.

¹⁶² Cf. Manresa Lamarca, “The Literal Sense,” 361.

¹⁶³ Cf. Dahan, “Thomas Aquinas,” 62–64; *ST III*, q. 42, a. 3, resp.: “Et sic Christus quaedam turbis loquebatur in occulto, parabolis utens ad annuntianda spiritualia mysteria, ad quae

As Olivier-Thomas Venard notes, for St Thomas there is no significant difference between designating with proper and figurative words, as both refer by way of a sign to the reality they denote, the mystery of which cannot be fully understood. Created reality itself carries a certain meaning and can become a figure of another reality. Because the cause transcends the effect it causes, Aquinas seeks more in the biblical word than the contemporary mentality allows.¹⁶⁴

Thomas believed that the natural way of knowing God is possible through negation, affirmation, and exaltation (*via negativa*, *via affirmativa*, *via eminentiae*).¹⁶⁵ Just as grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, so supernatural knowledge remains in continuity with natural knowledge and perfects it.¹⁶⁶ Knowledge through natural reason starts from images taken from sensually knowable objects and abstracted intellectual concepts. Revelation, thanks to grace, perfects both.¹⁶⁷ As Thomas writes, “the intellect’s natural light is strengthened by the infusion of gratuitous light,” and sometimes, e.g., in prophetic visions, “the images in the human imagination are divinely formed, so as to express divine things better than those do which we receive from sensible objects . . .”¹⁶⁸ Cognition intensified by grace offers a fuller knowledge of God; Aquinas assumes *triplex via* in supernatural cognition. One should also speak of an indirect nature in the case of revealed knowledge (Christ’s deeds as effects subject to the senses, Christ’s words giving knowledge of God through analogy and metaphor).¹⁶⁹

Holy Scripture and the Missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit

It is important to emphasize the connection between revelation (and therefore also Scripture) and the missions of the Divine Persons, which was significant

capienda non erant idonei vel digni. . . . Harum tamen parabolarum apertam et nudam veritatem dominus discipulis exponebat, per quos deveniret ad alios, qui essent idonei . . .”

¹⁶⁴ See Olivier-Thomas Venard, “Metaphor in Aquinas: Between *Necessitas* and *Delectatio*,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vigen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 222, 224–26.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Thomas de Aquino, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, q. 7, a. 5, ad. 2, vol. 2 of *Quaestiones disputatae* (Taurini: Marietti, 1931); International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria* (2011), no. 97, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_2011129_teologia-oggi_en.html.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation,” 65–66.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *ST I*, q. 12, a. 13, resp.

¹⁶⁸ *ST I*, q. 12, a. 13, resp.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation,” 66–67.

for St Thomas. The Son and the Holy Spirit act *ad extra* in a way that reflects their eternal origin and personal identity in the life of the Trinity *ad intra*.¹⁷⁰ As Aquinas explains, the mission of the Divine Persons presupposes “the procession of origin from the sender” and “a new way of existing in another.”¹⁷¹ The ultimate goal of the mission of the Divine Persons is to reveal the Person through whom a given Divine Person was sent. In his commentary on the fourth Gospel, Thomas writes that “[i]t was appropriate for the one baptized, for as the Son, existing by the Father, manifests the Father . . . , so the Holy Spirit, existing by the Son, manifests the Son” (cf. John 17:6; 16:14).¹⁷²

The Holy Spirit will therefore, according to Sebastian Walshe, reveal the Truth that is the Word of the Father, for the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son (cf. John 14:26). As a result of the Holy Spirit’s action, the Incarnation takes place and inspired writings directing us to him are created.¹⁷³ Aquinas emphasized the connection between the written word of God and the living Word of God:

For the word of God leads to Christ, since Christ himself is the natural Word of God. But every word inspired by God [*a Deo inspiratum*] is a certain participated likeness of that Word. Therefore, since every participated likeness leads to its original [*principium*], it is clear that every word inspired by God leads to Christ.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Blankenhorn, 71–76. Thomas assumes a connection between economy (*oikonomia*) and theology (*theologia*, Latin *dispensatio*). The missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit reveal the Holy Trinity, and the Son, as the Word of the Father, is the perfect expression of the Father, the “face of the Father” and the “doctrine of the Father” – cf. Gilles Emery, “Theologia and Dispensatio: The Centrality of the Divine Missions in St. Thomas’s Trinitarian Theology,” *The Thomist* 74, no. 4 (2010): 535, 539, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2010.0033>; Thomas de Aquino, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 101, ed. Raffaele Cai (Taurini: Marietti, 1972) (hereafter: *Super Ioann.*) (“... your Son, who is your face, by whom you are manifested [*Filiu tui, qui est facies tua, qua manifestaris*]”); *Super Ioann.*, cap. 7, lect. 2, n. 1037 (“... the doctrine of the Father is the Son himself [*doctrina Patris sit ipse Filius*]”).

¹⁷¹ *ST* I, q. 43, a. 1, resp.

¹⁷² *Super Ioann.*, cap. 1, lect. 14, n. 268. Cf. Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation,” 75.

¹⁷³ Cf. Sebastian Walshe, “Trinitarian Principles of Biblical Inspiration,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 14, no. 3 (2016): 975–76. The order of the missions—first the Son, then the Holy Spirit—also explains why the visible mission of the Holy Spirit could not take place in the Old Testament – cf. *ST* I, q. 43, a. 7, ad. 6.

¹⁷⁴ *Super Ioann.*, cap. 5, lect. 6, n. 820. Cf. Walshe, “Trinitarian Principles,” 977–78; Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciel*, 43.

In Aquinas' trinitarian theology, "the Son is the Word, not any sort of word, but one Who breathes forth Love." His mission must be analogous: "[t]hus the Son is sent not in accordance with every and any kind of intellectual perfection, but according to the intellectual illumination, which breaks forth into the affection of love . . ."¹⁷⁵ Scripture inspired by the Spirit and useful for salvation should be understood in a way that gives rise to love and promotes mercy, in accordance with the conviction already expressed by St. Augustine.¹⁷⁶ Manresa Lamarca distinguishes then three degrees of acceptance of the word of God: the transition from the letter of the text to its meaning; the transition from meaning to truth; and the transition from truth to beloved truth. Only *verbum spirans amorem* becomes the beginning of eternal life and the means to achieve it; it makes one like the Word of God and gives one to the Divine Persons.¹⁷⁷ "Scripture itself," Walshe insists, "reflects the inner life of God and is, by that very fact, more able to lead those who meditate upon it back to that inner life of the Trinity that is the beatitude of every rational creature."¹⁷⁸

The author of the fourth Gospel writes that in the Word of God "was life, and this life was the light of the human race, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4–5). According to Thomas, this statement can be explained "first, according to the influx of natural knowledge; second, according to the communication of grace."¹⁷⁹ Even natural knowledge comes from the Holy Spirit and is a certain likeness of divine truth imprinted on the human mind (cf. Ps 4:7).¹⁸⁰ All the more so in knowledge through grace, the Word is the light of believers.¹⁸¹ The light of men is the life of the Word,

¹⁷⁵ *ST* I, q. 43, a. 5, ad. 2.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Walshe, "Trinitarian Principles," 981; Aurelius Augustinus, "De doctrina christiana libri quatuor," I, XXXV, 39 – I, XXXVI, 41, in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 34 (Paris: Migne, 1865).

¹⁷⁷ Manresa Lamarca, "The Literal Sense," 357.

¹⁷⁸ Walshe, "Trinitarian Principles," 982.

¹⁷⁹ *Super Ioann.*, chap. 1, lect. 3, n. 95.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Super Ioann.*, cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 101–3; *Quodl.* VIII, q. 2, a. 2, resp.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, "General Audience Saint Thomas Aquinas (2)," June 16, 2010, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100616.html: "The trust with which St Thomas endows these two instruments of knowledge faith and reason may be traced back to the conviction that both stem from the one source of all truth, the divine *Logos*, which is active in both contexts, that of Creation and that of redemption." *Radical Orthodoxy* draws attention to the inseparability of knowledge through faith and reason, understood as participation in the divine mind; supporters of this movement emphasize that revelation is an intensification of human understanding – cf. Rupert Shortt, "Radical Orthodoxy: A Conversation," in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, ed. John Milbank and Simon Oliver (New York: Routledge, 2009), 39; John Milbank, "Knowledge:

“[f]or the Son of God assumed flesh and came into the world to illumine all men with grace and truth” (cf. John 18:37; 9:5). According to Aquinas, “these two have come to us through Christ: life, through a participation in grace, **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ** (John 1:17); and light, through a knowledge of truth and wisdom.”¹⁸²

In knowing God and salvation, the Holy Scriptures (cf. 2 Tim 3:14–16), written under inspiration that intensifies human knowledge (cf. 2 Pet 1:21), play a unique role compared to other literature. As Thomas explained in his lecture on the Second Letter to Timothy, “it has a special place above all writings, because others are given through human reason [*aliae sunt traditae per rationem humanam*], while Sacred Scripture is divine [*sacra autem Scriptura est divina*]” (cf. 2 Pet 1:21; Job 32:8).¹⁸³ Through Scripture, God works in a unique way:

... God works in two ways: either immediately, as his own work, when he works miracles [*immediate, ut proprium opus, sicut miracula*]; or mediately, by using secondary causes, as in the works of nature [*mediantibus causis inferioribus, ut opera naturalia*]. . . . And so in man he instructs the intellect both immediately by the Sacred Writings [*immediate per sacras litteras*], and mediately by other writings [*mediate per alias scripturas*].¹⁸⁴

These holy Scriptures, as Thomas emphasized earlier, quoting the words of Jesus, bear witness to him (cf. John 5:39). Therefore, the inspired writings teach about salvation “only **through the faith which is in Christ** Jesus.”¹⁸⁵ This means that for the Angelic Doctor, a Christological reading of Scripture is what matters. As Ratzinger wrote, for Thomas, the principle of the comprehensibility of history and its unity is the action of God, or more precisely, the historical event of Christ. Therefore, the whole of history and the whole of Scripture should be seen in the light of Christ.¹⁸⁶ Holmes writes about “a complex unity of anticipatory participation in the mystery of Christ,” and even about “the

The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 2002), 24; John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (New York: Routledge, 2001), 19–59.

¹⁸² *Super Ioann.*, cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 104.

¹⁸³ Thomas de Aquino, “Super secundam Epistolam ad Timotheum lectura,” cap. 3, lect. 3., n. 125, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953) (hereafter: *In II Tim.*).

¹⁸⁴ *In II Tim.* cap. 3, lect. 3., n. 126.

¹⁸⁵ *In II Tim.* cap. 3, lect. 3., n. 123.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 24.

ontologically grounded likeness of biblical realities to the mysteries of Christ's first and second comings . . . ”¹⁸⁷ Old Testament texts should be interpreted as pointing to Christ (literal non-Christological sense), or as speaking directly about him (literal Christological sense¹⁸⁸), or at least as capable of spiritual interpretation.

Shadow and Image Versus Glorious Reality

Blankenhorn states that “[f]or Aquinas, it is crucial to forge the right link between eschatology and revelation.”¹⁸⁹ The author of the *Summa* begins with the ultimate form of knowing God in glory, and then moves on to lower forms.¹⁹⁰ If in heaven the minds are enlightened by the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*), then in this world God grants the gift of the Holy Spirit in the form of a special prophetic light (*lumen propheticum*),¹⁹¹ writes Nicholas Healy. Inner and mental light elevates the mind to the knowledge of things that the intellect cannot reach with its natural light.¹⁹² Thomas, referring to 1 Cor 13:8–10, considers

¹⁸⁷ Holmes, “Participation and the Meaning of Scripture,” 113. On the anticipatory or “economical” participation of Old Covenant persons and events in the mystery of Christ, cf. Francis Martin, “Revelation and Understanding Scripture: Reflections on the Teaching of Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 13, no. 1 (2015): 253–72; Francis Martin, *Sacred Scripture: The Disclosure of the Word* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2006), 274.

¹⁸⁸ Aquinas, for example, includes the Christological interpretation of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23) – cf. Nicholas M. Healy, “Introduction,” in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocom (London: T&T Clark International, 2006), 16. Cf. also Timothy F. Bellamah, “The Interpretation of a Contemplative: Thomas’ Commentary *Super Iohannem*,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 250.

¹⁸⁹ Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation,” 62.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Blankenhorn, 63.

¹⁹¹ Cf. N. M. Healy, “Introduction,” 13. Cf. also Artur Andrzejuk, *Teologia trynitarna i chrystologia*, vol. 1 of *Tomasz z Akwinu jako teolog* (Warszawa: Naukowe Towarzystwo Tomistyczne, 2022), 41.

¹⁹² Cf. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, cap. 154, Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. Edita, 13–15 (Rome: Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1918–1930) (hereafter: *ScG*); Elders, “Aquinas on Holy Scripture,” 132. Cf. also *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 1, resp.; *ST* II–II, q. 176, a. 2, resp. (“. . . donum prophetiae consistit in ipsa illuminatione mentis ad cognoscendum intelligibilem veritatem”); Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 12, a. 2, ad 11, Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M.

prophecy to be partial, imperfect knowledge that will disappear when God's revelation reaches perfection in the heavenly homeland. In other words, the gift of prophetic revelation is an imperfect participation in glorious revelation.¹⁹³

This kind of revelation on earth, writes Leo Elders, has been given to prophets and apostles, who pass it on to others, which also takes place through the writing down of revelation (Scripture).¹⁹⁴ "For God reveals in order that it be announced to others" (cf. Jer 1:9).¹⁹⁵ Aquinian eschatology, as Blankenhorn notes, "helps to draw out the limits of the biblical word, while also seeing that word as a foretaste of glory."¹⁹⁶ Sacred Scripture, or more broadly *sacra doctrina*, is a partial participation in the beatific knowledge of the saints.¹⁹⁷ Aquinas writes explicitly about this: "... sacred doctrine is a science because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed."¹⁹⁸

The distinction between revelation in the future and present eon is of profound importance for understanding biblical senses. Aquinas writes:

Now this spiritual sense has a threefold division [*sensus spiritualis trifariam dividitur*]. For as the Apostle says (Heb 7:19), *the Old Law is a figure of the New Law* [*lex vetus figura est novae legis*], and Dionysius says (*Coel. Hier. i*) *the New Law itself is a figure of the future glory* [*est figura futurae gloriae*]. Again, in the New Law, whatever our Head has done is a type of what we ought to do.¹⁹⁹

The author of the *Summa* does not actually quote Heb 7:19, but Heb 10:1; in the commentary to this passage there is a reference to Heb 7:19 – both passages complement each other.

Edita, 22.1–3 (Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae; Editori di San Tommaso, 1970–1976) (hereafter: *De veritate*) ("... omnia illa quorum cognitio potest esse utilis ad salutem est materia prophetiae, sive sint praeterita, sive praesentia sive futura, sive etiam aeterna, sive necessaria, sive contingentia. And those things which cannot pertain to salvation are foreign to the matter of prophecy").

¹⁹³ Cf. *ST* II–II, q. 171, a. 4 ad 2; Elders, "Aquinas on Holy Scripture," 133.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Elders, 133.

¹⁹⁵ *In 1 Cor.*, cap. 14, lect. 1, n. 812.

¹⁹⁶ Blankenhorn, "Locating a Theology of Revelation," 64–65.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Blankenhorn, 58, 65. The author draws on his monograph: Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 296–99.

¹⁹⁸ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 2, resp.

¹⁹⁹ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 10, resp. Cf. *In Gal.*, cap. 4, lect. 7, n. 254; *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, resp. and ad. 4; Torrell, "Saint Thomas and His Sources," 4; Reinhardt, "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter," 30.

The Old Law relates to future (heavenly) goods “as a shadow to a body [*sicut umbra ad corpus*], but the new law as an image [*sicut imago*.]” The New Law presents future goods more clearly, because, first, “express mention and a promise of good things to come are found in the words of the New Testament,” and second, “because the power of the New Testament consists in charity, which is the fulfillment of the law. And although this charity is imperfect by reason of the faith in which it inheres, it is, nevertheless, similar to the charity of heaven.” Therefore, the New Law is referred to as the law of love and “it is called an image [*imago*], because it has an expressed likeness to the goods to come [*similitudinem expressam bonorum futurorum*.]” On the other hand, the Old Law, Aquinas continues, “represented it by carnal things; hence it is called a shadow [*umbra*] This therefore is the condition of the Old Testament, that it was but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities [*umbram futurorum, non rerum imaginem*.]”²⁰⁰

As Thomas states, referring to Heb 7:19, “that perfection is reserved for the new law [*perfectio reservatur novae legi*] and consists in *charity* [*quae consistit in charitate*], which is the bond of perfection (Col:14).”²⁰¹ The law did not bring anyone to justice or to their homeland [*nec scilicet iustitiae, nec patriae*], and it became perfect through Christ [*perfecta fuit per Christum*.]²⁰² People separated by sin may come closer to God thanks to the new priest who takes away the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29; Rom 5:1–2).²⁰³

Also interesting is Thomas’ commentary on Col 2:17, in which the *magister in sacra pagina* explains that Christians cannot be condemned for not observing the precepts of the Law concerning eating, drinking, or celebrating holidays.

For these **are a shadow of things to come** [*umbrae futurorum*], that is, of Christ. And when the truth comes, the shadow should cease [*debet cessare umbra*], **but the body is of Christ.** When someone sees a shadow, he expects the body or substantial reality to follow. Now the legal observances of the law were the shadow going before Christ [*Legalia autem sunt umbra praecedens Christum*], and they signified his coming [*et eum figurabant venturum*]; and so Paul says, **the body**, that is, the truth of the thing, belongs to Christ, but the shadow belongs to the law [*veritas rei pertinet ad Christum; sed umbra ad legem*.]²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ *In Heb.* cap. 10, lect. 1, n. 480.

²⁰¹ *In Heb.* cap. 10, lect. 1, n. 480.

²⁰² *In Heb.* cap. 7, lect. 3, n. 362.

²⁰³ *In Heb.* cap. 7, lect. 3, n. 363.

²⁰⁴ Thomas de Aquino, “Super Epistolam ad Colossenses lectura,” cap. 2, lect. 4, n. 121, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953) (hereafter: *In Col.*).

In this commentary, the shadow appears directly as the shadow of the Body of Christ, and therefore the future events foretold by the commandments of the Law are the very Person of Christ. The New Law would therefore be an image of the final encounter with God in glory, which, however, already in this world, by virtue of the hypostatic union, is an encounter with the Word, in whom “dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily” (Col 2:9). Aquinas emphasizes that Christ, who dwelt in the Old Law in the manner of a shadow, in the New Law “dwells bodily, that is, really and truly [*inhabitabat corporaliter, id est realiter et secundum veritatem*].”²⁰⁵ God dwelt in the souls of the saints through love and knowledge, “but God dwells in Christ by assuming a man into the unity of his person,” and therefore “his flesh and mind are indwelt because both are united to the Word” (cf. John 1:14).²⁰⁶

In temporality, divine truth, as Thomas maintains following Dionysius, must be viewed in the form of figures accessible to the senses. However, the difference between the Old and New Laws is significant: in the Old Law, divine truth itself was not yet revealed, and the path leading to it had not yet been opened (cf. Heb 9:8). Therefore, the external worship of the Old Law remained a symbol not only of the truth that would be revealed in heaven, but also of Christ as the way leading to heavenly revelation. In the New Law, however, the way has already been revealed, and only the truth of glory needs to be symbolically foretold. According to the Universal Doctor, this is what the apostle had in mind when he wrote about the Law having a shadow and not the image of things.²⁰⁷

One can perceive, as David C. Steinmetz does, the three spiritual senses of Scripture in connection with theological virtues: the allegorical meaning would correspond to the virtue of faith, the tropological to the virtue of love, and the anagogical to the virtue of hope.²⁰⁸ The Holy Spirit given to believers as a guarantee (*arrabōn, pignus*) (cf. 2 Cor 5:5) offers the certainty of their future inheritance (cf. Eph 1:13–14), “because the Holy Spirit has as much value as heavenly glory.” The difference lies in the manner of possession: “now we have him as a surety of obtaining that glory; but in heaven we shall have him as something now possessed by us. For then we shall have him perfectly, but now imperfectly.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ *In Col.*, cap. 2, lect. 2, n. 97.

²⁰⁶ *In Col.*, cap. 2, lect. 2, n. 97.

²⁰⁷ Cf. *ST I–II*, q. 101, a. 2, resp.

²⁰⁸ Cf. David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” *Ex Auditu* 1 (1985): 76.

²⁰⁹ Thomas de Aquino, “Super secundam Epistolam ad Corinthios lectura,” cap. 5, lect. 2, n. 161, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 1 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953) (hereafter: *In II Cor.*).

Christological Origins of Spiritual Senses

The division into literal and spiritual senses is consistent with Scripture and even has its roots in Jesus' use of Scripture to make Christological interpretations of the Old Testament (cf. Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39), which was followed by the early Church.²¹⁰ Per Erik Persson argues that for Thomas, the binary division is fundamental, within which Thomas makes a further distinction:

... for Thomas scripture is to be interpreted in a twofold rather than a fourfold 'sense'. He refers constantly to a *significatio per voces* and a *significatio per res*, a distinction which corresponds in the conventional terminology to the *sensus historicus vel litteralis* on the one hand and the *sensus mysticus seu spiritualis* on the other. The other three current interpretations, *sensus allegoricus*, *sensus moralis*, and *sensus anagogicus*, are special instances of the spiritual sense.²¹¹

Based on Aquinas' work,²¹² the following classification of the senses of Scripture can be proposed:

1. Literal sense (when revelation is made through words).
2. Spiritual sense (when revelation is made through figures of things; the Old Law is here a figure of the New Law):
 - 2.1. When spiritual sense serves righteous action:
 - 2.1.1. Moral sense, also known as tropological sense (applies to situations in which the deeds performed by Christ and the things

²¹⁰ Cf. Surmanski, "The Literal Sense of Scripture," 41; Wilhelmus G. B. M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Publications of the Aquinas Instituut te Utrecht. New Series 6 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 80.

²¹¹ Persson, *Sacra Doctrina*, 54. As Valkenberg has shown, for Thomas as a commentator on Scripture (e.g., the Gospel of John), the most important thing is the difference between the literal and spiritual (or mystical) senses, which is why *the magister in sacra pagina* writes about the meaning *secundum litteram* and *secundum mysterium* – Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God*, 171–72 (together with n. 96).

²¹² Cf. *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, resp. and ad. 4; *ST* I, q. 1, a. 10, resp.; *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*, prol. 5, resp., ed. Pierre Mandonnet, vol. 1–4, *Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. Edita* (Parisii: P. Lethielleux, 1929–1947); *In Gal.*, cap. 4, lect. 7, n. 254. Cf. also *In II Tim.* cap. 3, lect. 3., n. 127: "Consequently, there are four effects of Sacred Scripture [*Sic ergo quadruplex est effectus sacrae Scripturae*], namely, to teach the truth, to reject falsity, as far as the speculative intellect is concerned; to snatch evil and induce to good, as far as the practical intellect is concerned."

that took place in Christ as the Head or that signified Christ are signs of what the members of Christ's Body should do).

2.2. When spiritual sense serves true faith:

2.2.1. allegorical sense, i.e., typological (in the case where the Old Testament prefigures the New Testament; things of the Old Testament are interpreted with Christ and the Church in mind)²¹³;

2.2.2. anagogical sense (in cases where both testaments signify the triumphant Church; the New Law is a figure of future glory; things that were accomplished in Christ or signified him signify those things that are in glory).²¹⁴

For Aquinas, Christ is “the center and summit of Sacred Scripture and ultimately the reason for its unity,” writes Elisabeth Reinhardt.²¹⁵ And even, it should be added, of the entire history of salvation, including that “after Christ” (the time of the Church on its way to glory). As Blankenhorn notes, “Revelation means that Christ the teacher, by all that he said, did, and suffered, illuminates his disciples on their eschatological end and the Christ-like virtues needed to obtain that end.”²¹⁶ St Thomas, presenting the mysteries of the Savior (and Revealer), bases himself on the axiom: *Omnis Christi actio nostra est instructio*. However, the deeds themselves remain insufficient; they fulfill their epiphanic function only in connection with the words of Christ, which take precedence in Christ’s revelation.²¹⁷

As Thomas Joseph White has shown, whose reflections are in line with the Christological principles articulated in the *Summa*, Christ’s earthly life can reveal the Father because the prophetic knowledge in Christ’s human consciousness remained connected with the beatific vision. Thanks to this, Jesus as a human being knew (and not only believed) at every moment who he was and what he wanted as the Son in unity with the Father (cf. John 5:18–19), and

²¹³ Interestingly, Aquinas justifies only this meaning with a biblical reference – cf. *In Gal.*, cap. 4, lect. 7, n. 247, 253–54.

²¹⁴ Following Dionysius, Thomas writes about the intermediate state of the Church – between the state of the Old Testament Synagogue and the state of the Church triumphant: “for the Old Testament was a figure of the New, and Old and New simultaneously are a figure of heavenly things” (allegorical sense) and “simultaneously signify the Church triumphant, and thus it is the anagogical sense” – *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, resp.

²¹⁵ Cf. Reinhardt, “Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter,” 88; Thomas de Aquino, “Super Epistolam ad Romanos lectura,” cap. 1, lect. 2, n. 29, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 1 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953): “Convenienter autem Filius Dei materia Sanctorum Scripturarum esse dicitur . . .”

²¹⁶ Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation,” 57.

²¹⁷ Cf. Blankenhorn, 83–85. Cf. *ST III*, q. 40, a. 1, ad. 3: “. . . *actio Christi* fuit nostra *instructio*.”

thus he could reveal the divine will. The grace of the beatific vision allowed the Incarnate One to understand his identity as the Son, and therefore did not bring awareness of the Trinity as separate from himself.²¹⁸ In this way, Christ's *gesta et verba* become a revelation of God and at the same time point to the full revelation available to people in glory.

Taking all this into account, we can recapitulate the three spiritual senses of the New Testament based on their relationship to Christ (and the Church he founded):

- Things concerning Christ as Head also concern the members of the Body of Christ, “because the true body of Christ itself, and those things which are in it, have been borne by figure of the mystical body and of those which are borne in it. From Christ himself we ought also to assume an example of living; in him also future glory is foreshadowed for us.” Therefore, “those things which according to the letter are told concerning Christ the head can be expounded allegorically as referring to his mystical body, and morally as referring to our acts which ought to be informed according to him, and anagogically inasmuch as the path of glory has been demonstrated for us in Christ himself.”²¹⁹ Thus, “so far as the things done in Christ, or so far as the things which signify Christ, are types of what we ought to do, there is the moral sense. But so far as they signify what relates to eternal glory, there is the anagogical sense.”²²⁰ According to Aquinas, “just as the allegorical sense pertains to Christ according as he is head of the Church militant justifying her and infusing grace, so also the anagogical sense pertains to him according as he is head of the Church triumphant glorifying her.”²²¹
- What is said about the Church in the literal sense is not interpreted allegorically, but morally and anagogically.²²²
- What is moral in the literal sense is interpreted only anagogically.²²³
- „Whereas those which according to the literal sense pertain to the state of glory are accustomed to be expounded by no other sense, since they themselves are not a figure of other things, but are figured by all other things.”²²⁴

²¹⁸ Cf. Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series 5 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 236–74.

²¹⁹ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 5.

²²⁰ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 10, resp.

²²¹ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 4.

²²² Cf. *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 5.

²²³ Cf. *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 5.

²²⁴ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 5.

Only in cases where the New Testament speaks of glorious realities can one rely on the literal sense. In all other cases, one must seek the spiritual sense, and only now does the statement that the spiritual sense is based on the literal sense take on its full force. As Manresa Lamarca rightly emphasizes, “the literal sense of the New Testament is the sense that, above all, God wanted to communicate, as it contains the fullness of revelation and thus opens true understanding of the literal sense of all Scripture, and of its spiritual senses. Let us now look at this.”²²⁵

Sensus Carnalis Versus Sensus Spiritualis

As Benedict XVI recalled in his exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Thomas, following Augustine, “insists that ‘the letter, even that of the Gospel, would kill, were there not the inward grace of healing faith’” (VD 29). Aquinas believed that the Law of the Gospel is primarily the grace of the Holy Spirit given to believers internally and justifying them. A secondary component of the New Law are the teachings of faith [*documenta fidei*] and the commandments which direct human affections and human actions, which cannot justify by themselves. *Magister in sacra pagina* interprets the words of the Apostle recorded in 2 Cor 3:6 as follows: the letter is what is written and exists outside of people (including the Gospel!), and the spirit is healing grace. God wrote the Old Law on stone tablets, and the New Law, through the Spirit of the living God, on the living tablets of hearts (cf. 2 Cor 3:3).²²⁶

This statement should be applied to the understanding of Scripture, especially the New Testament. The literal sense of the New Testament will refer to the fulfillment of figures. An example here can be “the relation between corporeal and spiritual food,” manna and the Eucharist (cf. John 6:27), which, according to Timothy F. Bellamah, “corresponds to the relation between the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture.”²²⁷ The literal sense of the New Testament must be preserved, but the spiritual reality to which it refers should be understood in accordance with that spiritual reality. According to Thomas, Jesus’ words in John 6:63

²²⁵ Manresa Lamarca, “The Literal Sense,” 351.

²²⁶ Cf. *ST I-II*, q. 106, art. 2, resp. and ad. 3. Cf. also *ST III*, q. 42, a. 4.

²²⁷ Cf. Bellamah, “Interpretation of a Contemplative,” 252.

can be understood in two senses [*secundum duplarem sensum*]: in a spiritual way, and in a material way [*secundum spiritualem et secundum corporalem*]. . . . What our Lord said about eating his flesh is interpreted in a material way [*carnaliter intelliguntur*] when it is understood in its superficial meaning [*secundum quod verba exterius sonant*], and as pertaining to the nature of flesh [*et ut natura carnis habet*]. . . . But our Lord said that he would give himself to them as spiritual food [*spiritualem cibum*], not as though the true flesh of Christ [*vera caro Christi*] is not present in this sacrament of the altar, but because it is eaten in a certain spiritual and divine way [*spirituali et divino modo manducatur*]. Thus, the correct meaning of these words is spiritual, not material [*sensus est non carnalis, sed spiritualis*].²²⁸

It follows that spiritual sense is one thing and the reading in a spiritual sense is another. As Reinhard Hütter notes, Aquinas retained the simple, literal sense of the Lord's words (cf. Luke 22:19), which, however, together with the Church, he understood "according to spiritual sense."²²⁹ Manresa Lamarca aptly concludes: ". . . as the literal sense of the New Testament is the fullness of revelation and the key that opens the rest of Scripture, the interpreter will achieve understanding of Scripture insofar as he achieves spiritual understanding of the literal sense of the New Testament."²³⁰ The transition from the "letter" to the "spirit" is possible thanks to the removal of the veil from the hearts (cf. 2 Cor 3:15) through faith in Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit.²³¹ Thomas emphasizes that the grace of revelation must also be matched by the grace of interpreting what has been revealed:

Next in rank to those who receive revelation from God immediately, another degree of grace is necessary. For, since God vouchsafes revelation to man not only for the present time, but also for the instruction of all in the time to come, it was necessary that the things revealed should be delivered not only by word

²²⁸ *Super Ioann.*, cap. 6, lect. 8, n. 992. Cf. Bellamah, "Interpretation of a Contemplative," 253.

²²⁹ Cf. Reinhard Hütter, "Transubstantiation Revisited: Sacra Doctrina, Dogma, and Metaphysics," in *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Romanus Cessario, O.P.* Ed. Reinhard Hütter and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 27, 31 (with n. 19). Similarly, Trinitarian speculations about the begetting of the Son by the Father were an attempt to rationally penetrate the truth of faith expressed in the literal sense of the New Testament – cf., e.g., *ST* I, q. 41, a. 3, resp.

²³⁰ Manresa Lamarca, "The Literal Sense," 355.

²³¹ Cf. Manresa Lamarca, "The Literal Sense," 356–57, 360–63 (with n. 55 on pp. 363–64). Accepting as true what is revealed through the preachers of the faith (cf. Rom 10:15) takes place *per internam inspirationem* – cf. *ST* II–II, q. 6, a. 1, resp.; *De veritate* q. 18, a. 3, resp.

of mouth to the present generation, but also by the written word for the instruction of the future generation. Hence the need for someone to interpret these writings. And this must be a divine grace, even as revelation itself was made by the grace of God. Therefore, it is said: *Do not interpretations belong to God?* (Gen 40:8).²³²

In his commentary on 2 Cor 3:12–18, Thomas writes that the veil that is unveiled in Christ “was the dimness of the figures [*obscuritas figurarum*].”²³³ It was removed “by fulfilling in truth [*implendo in veritate*] what Moses delivered in figure [*tradidit in figura*], because all things happened to them in a figure [*quia omnia in figura contingebant illis*].” Through his death and by sending the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers, Christ made it possible that “they might understand spiritually [*intelligerent spiritualiter*] what the Jews understood carnally [*carnaliter intelligunt*]” (cf. Luke 24:45).²³⁴ The Jews still “believe the veil of God not as a figure but as truth [*sic velamen Dei, non figuram, sed veritatem credunt*] . . .”²³⁵

Those who believe in Christ gaze upon the Lord’s brightness with their faces unveiled, and “[b]y face is meant the heart or the mind [cor, seu mens], because just as a person sees bodily with the face, so spiritually with the mind.”²³⁶ According to Thomas, “[b]eholding, i.e., speculating [*speculantes*]” comes “from ‘mirror [*speculo*],’ i.e., knowing the glorious God himself by the mirror of reason [*per speculum rationis*], in which there is an image of God.” Considering that “all knowledge involves the knower’s being assimilated to the thing known [*assimilationem cognoscentis ad cognitum*], it is necessary that those who see be in some way transformed into God [*aliquo modo transformentur in Deum*].” Perfectly in heaven (cf. 1 John 3:2), and imperfectly in temporal conditions, when it is done through faith (cf. 1 Cor 13:12).²³⁷

Thomas provides additional explanations in his commentary on 1 Cor 2:10–16, in which it is important to contrast the sensual man with the spiritual man (vv. 14 and 15). People are described as sensual, the commentator says, in two ways:

²³² *ScG* III, cap. 154.

²³³ *In II Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 3, n. 104.

²³⁴ *In II Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 3, n. 105.

²³⁵ *In II Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 3, n. 107.

²³⁶ *In II Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 3, n. 113.

²³⁷ *In II Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 3, n. 114.

first, on the basis of the perceptive power, where a man is called sensual in perception, because he judges about God in terms of bodily images or the letter of the law or philosophical reasons [*de Deo iuxta corporum phantasiam vel legis litteram, vel rationem philosophicam iudicat*], all of which are interpreted in accordance with the sense-powers [*quae secundum vires sensitivas accipiuntur*]. Second, on the basis of the appetitive power, which is attracted only to things that appeal to the sense appetite.²³⁸

According to Aquinas, *animalis homo* (a sensual man) cannot comprehend matters that come from the Holy Spirit, as they transcend human senses and reason.²³⁹ Such a person “has his intellect darkened and his will disarranged, as far as spiritual goods are concerned.”²⁴⁰ As a result, “a sensual person understands spiritual words as proverbs [*verba spiritualia accipit ut proverbia*],” even though they do not take the form of proverbs, “because the mind of such a person cannot rise above material things [*quia mens eius supra corporalia elevari non valens*] . . .”²⁴¹ A person is called spiritual “first, on the part of the intellect enlightened by the Spirit of God” and “[s]econd, on the part of the will enkindled by the Spirit of God.”²⁴² *Spiritualis homo* “understands spiritual words as spiritual.”²⁴³

In other words, the criterion for division is a way of life that is either natural or subject to the action of grace. Commenting on 1 Cor 3:3, Thomas argues that “carnal men [*homines carnales*] are said to **walk according to** man” because they act “according to human nature left to itself by the Spirit of God [*secundum naturam humanam sibi a Dei spiritu derelictam*] . . .” Only when “man’s spirit is raised above man by the Spirit of God [*spiritus hominis per spiritum Dei supra hominem elevetur*]” does man become spiritual.²⁴⁴ Ultimately, only the Holy Spirit can examine spiritual matters.²⁴⁵ It follows from the above that the spiritual reading of the inspired books is reading in the Holy Spirit.

²³⁸ *In I Cor.*, cap. 2, lect. 3, n. 112. Cf. Manresa Lamarca, “The Literal Sense,” 364.

²³⁹ Cf. *In I Cor.*, cap. 2, lect. 3, n. 113.

²⁴⁰ *In I Cor.*, cap. 2, lect. 3, n. 118.

²⁴¹ *Super Ioann.*, cap. 16, lect. 7, n. 2152.

²⁴² *In I Cor.*, cap. 2, lect. 3, n. 117.

²⁴³ *Super Ioann.*, cap. 16, lect. 7, n. 2152.

²⁴⁴ Cf. *In I Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 1, n. 130.

²⁴⁵ Cf. *In I Cor.*, cap. 2, lect. 3, n. 115.

Conclusion

The research was admittedly limited to the methodological assumptions formulated by Ratzinger and Aquinas. It might be expected that an examination of the exegetical practice of both scholars would shed new light and, quite likely, would require a revision of some of the claims. Below, I recapitulate the main conclusions, arranging them in such a way as to highlight both the similarities between Ratzinger's and Aquinas' approaches and the significant differences between them.

1. Benedict XVI noted that in the patristic and medieval periods, attempts were made to start from the literal sense of Scripture, even though the philological and historical resources available today were not available then. The Pope pointed out that in the times of the Fathers and the Middle Ages, exegesis practiced in the spirit of faith did not necessarily distinguish between the literal and spiritual senses. On the other hand, Benedict XVI took the position that scientific research and faith, literal sense and spiritual sense, cannot be separated. Referring to the classic couplet about the senses of Scripture, the Pope emphasized the unity and connection between literal and spiritual sense. The Pope more clearly emphasized both the difference between the literal and spiritual senses and the harmony between them. He opposed spiritual interpretations not based on the foundation of the literal sense, and at the same time he perceived the literal sense itself as impossible to identify outside of faith.

The enduring significance of the Church Fathers is expressed, according to Ratzinger, in the unity of the Bible, liturgy, and theology the Fathers developed. The rational responsibility of faith compels Ratzinger to appreciate the function of scientific methods in exegesis. In his view, the retrieving of the traditional doctrine of the four senses involves taking into account the contribution of the historical-critical method, provided that this method should become a theological discipline without losing its historical character. The use of the historical-critical method should take place in the spirit of the hermeneutics of faith, which would also involve a reform of the understanding of rationality ("better philosophy," more in line with the biblical text). The two levels of Bible study are united "without confusion and without separation" in the spirit of Chalcedonian Creed.

Aquinas took the position that the distinction between literal and spiritual senses is related to different ways of signifying: when words signify things, we speak of historical or literal sense; when the things signified by words signify other things, we speak of spiritual sense. The spiritual sense has its foundation in the literal sense and presupposes it, and even, according to Aquinas,

derives from it. *Magister in sacra pagina* takes the position that the spiritual sense cannot convey something necessary for faith that would not be revealed elsewhere in the literal sense. It is the literal sense, due to its unambiguity, that forms the basis of argumentation in *sacra doctrina*. The most important thing for Aquinas is, of course, the literal sense of the New Testament, because it contains the fullness of Revelation, and it is this sense that makes it possible to search for spiritual senses throughout Scripture.

2. Ratzinger emphasized that Scripture testifies to the coherent history of the People of God in which God acted. The dyadic concept (divine author vs. human author) was transformed by Ratzinger into triple authorship: (i) a single author (group of authors); (ii) on a deeper level, the People of God to which they belong; (iii) God, who leads the People of God and speaks to them through people. The historical *intentio auctoris* was thus relativized; in Ratzinger's concept, it is the People of God who are the subject of Scripture, and therefore he ultimately shifts the focus from the single author to the overarching intentionality of the entire Bible. In this claim, one can find a different division between literal and spiritual senses than that of Aquinas – the future history of the community of faith illuminates the individual stages of the common path not only when some things become signs of others. The emphasis is on the multidimensionality of the word, which, in connection with God's action in the history of salvation, opens up the possibility of searching for multiple senses of the biblical word.

Doctor Angelicus assumes the dual authorship of Scripture, with God remaining the principal Author (*Auctor principalis*) and man being the instrumental author (*auctor instrumentalis*). The Holy Spirit uses the language of the hagiographer as a writer uses a stylus. The Spirit writes quickly in the heart of the inspired author, which means that the Spirit immediately fills the human author with wisdom through divine revelation. Aquinas seems to suggest an analogy between the eternal Word of God and the written word of God. On the one hand, the Son is the language of the Father, and on the other hand, God speaks through the holy writers. Perhaps this is why Aquinas sees the Christological meaning of the Old Testament also in a literal sense. However, even in Aquinas' system, there is considerable flexibility in finding literal sense, since, first of all, all words are the words of the Son, and secondly, the hagiographer is an fallible tool and does not know everything that God wanted to say through him.

3. Ratzinger argued that in the words of the People of God, which matured in the history of faith and were recorded at a specific time, there is always an added value related to the future path of the community of faith. He also pointed

out that the words of Scripture, as an expression of revelation transcending the hagiographer's experience, always contain a meaning "exceeding" the historical *locus* of the text. It is God, who, guiding the People of God, determines the multiple senses of Scripture, using the multidimensionality of human speech for this purpose. In subsequent stages of salvation history, words reveal their inner potentialities. In this way, God can use human words to give a sense that transcends the given moment and thus ensure the unity of the entire *historia salutis*. Ratzinger's approach allows him to reinterpret the traditional doctrine of the four senses: these are not parallel senses, but rather dimensions of the word.

Doctor Communis justifies the spiritual sense with God's authorship and providence. It is God who arranges all things in their course so that they may convey the sense intended by him. God is the author of both senses, literal and spiritual. In Aquinas' system, an understanding of history in terms of participation, different from the modern one, plays an important role. Scripture, in recounting the events of salvation history, simultaneously reveals the mystery. In this case, too, we can speak of a "surplus" of meaning hidden in human words, connected with the expression of prophetic revelation in human words. Ultimately, it is God alone who can reveal the fuller sense of Scripture, "writing" the history of salvation and speaking through an inspired author who expresses what cannot be expressed in writing.

This means that biblical language is an analogical language. Aquinas maintains that Scripture conveys divine and spiritual things through the likeness of material things. The literal sense, which is not identical with what is literalistic, is the meaning intended by God as the author of Scripture. Aquinas also includes the parabolic sense in the literal sense, since words can be signified either literally or figuratively – the literal sense in this case is what the figure represents. Both natural and supernatural knowledge of God is achieved through negation, affirmation, and exaltation (*triplex via*). Aquinas assumes the indirect nature of revealed knowledge, even in the case of Christ's words and deeds. On the other hand, he emphasizes that *sacra Scriptura est divina*, and God shapes the human mind directly through the Holy Scriptures and indirectly through other literature that has its source in human reason.

4. Ratzinger insists that canonical exegesis can be an organic continuation of the historical-critical method. What matters is not primarily the historical literal sense, but what God intended to say throughout the history of salvation through Scripture as a whole. Biblical texts should first be interpreted in their historical context, but assuming a divine factor at work in history, and then read in the light of the entire historical movement with the "event of Christ" at its center. For Ratzinger, Christological hermeneutics, which makes it possible

to see the unity of Scripture, cannot deprive the individual stages of salvation history of their historical originality. In Ratzinger's opinion, the Church Fathers lacked the first step, and scientific exegesis lacked the second. Ratzinger emphasizes the importance of the historical-critical method at the stage of the first step, but on the other hand, he does not equate the literal sense with the meaning discovered by the historical-critical method, unless it has become a theological method.

With Aquinas' understanding of history and divine authorship and providence the holistic reading of the Bible is also connected. The depth of what God intended to reveal can only be discovered in canonical interpretation. Importantly, Aquinas, assuming that we are dealing with figures in the Old Testament, takes the literal sense of the Old Testament seriously.

5. An important theme in Ratzinger's work is the Christological interpretation of the Old Testament, which, in accordance with the heritage of the Church Fathers, he identified with typological interpretation. Scripture as a whole becomes *sacramentum*, everything in it is a prefiguration of Christ. Ratzinger drew attention to the connection between the word and the sacrament, which reflects the transition between the Old and New Covenants. The realities of the New Testament are no longer *sacramenta futuri*; the New Testament writings testify to a reality that is already present. It is precisely the sacrament that points to what has already been given with Christ and his Passover. Spiritual sense, therefore, is the sense expressed by biblical texts when they are read in the Holy Spirit in the context of the Paschal mystery and new life. Exegesis is inextricably linked to church life.

Ratzinger opted for maintaining the "unity through diversity" of the Old and New Testaments. This unity, full of tension, is decisive for understanding the senses of Scripture. Ratzinger firmly rejects what he calls a naive and direct Christological interpretation of the Old Testament. Unlike Aquinas, he does not find Christ in the literal sense of the Old Testament. Only when incorporated into the life or death of Christ do words reveal their Christological sense (cf. e.g., Ps 22). Applying Christology to the Old Testament misses the reality of history and the dynamics of faith that transcends the letter. Scripture should be read taking into account both the difference and the unity between a promise and its fulfillment. The apostolic witness to Christ can only be preserved in the connection between the letter and the spirit.

To understand Aquinas' approach to the senses of Scripture, it is important to consider the connection between eschatology and revelation. If in heaven one can attain the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*), then in this world God grants prophetic light (*lumen propheticum*). Scripture (and the entire *sacra doctrina*

in general) is an imperfect, partial participation in the knowledge of God and the saints in heaven. The distinction between glorious and earthly revelation is essential to understanding Aquinas' approach of biblical senses. Aquinas derives the spiritual sense from the fact that the Old Law is a figure of the New, and the New is a figure of future glory.

From this Christological-eschatological perspective, we can recapitulate Aquinas' classification of biblical senses. Things concerning Christ as Head refer figuratively to the members of the Body of Christ. What is said about Christ in a literal sense, and those things that signify Christ, are interpreted allegorically, tropologically, and anagogically in relation to the mystical Body and individual Christians. What the literal sense expresses about the Church is still subject to moral and anagogical interpretation. If matters of morality are already found in the literal sense, one can still seek the anagogical sense. However, according to the *magister in sacra pagina*, what is said in the literal sense about the glorious reality is not interpreted in any other sense.

6. Ratzinger departed from defining Christian interpretation as allegorical and preferred the term Christological-pneumatological interpretation. If allegory is associated with a literary expedient, Christological-pneumatological interpretation expresses the historical transition associated with the advent of the New Covenant (the coming of Christ and the sending of the Spirit). The presence of the Risen One in the Church through his Spirit makes it possible to read the Law and the Prophets in the light of God's final self-revelation.

Reading the Old Testament as oriented towards the Risen One means the pneumatization (spiritualization) of the Old Testament. Ratzinger strongly accentuates that it is also an "incarnation" because the Holy Spirit dwells in the Body of Jesus. The letter has been liberated in relation to Christ, and the reminding work of the Spirit is accomplished in the Church. Ratzinger saw in certain statements by Thomas Aquinas concerning church music a kind of spiritualization of the Old Testament that was not adequately matched by consideration of the dimension of the Incarnation. As a result, Ratzinger judged that Aquinas did not recognize the theological significance of the literal sense of the Old Testament and considered it worthless for Christians. Ratzinger emphasizes that Christian spiritualization is a striving to encounter the Lord, who is Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:17), in such a way that his Body is embraced by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

Aquinas' assumption is that the Old Law is to heavenly goods as a shadow is to the body, and the New Law is as an image. Believers already possess the Holy Spirit who imparts love, but not yet perfectly. According to Aquinas, the Old Law is also a shadow of the body of Christ, preceding and foreshadowing

the Incarnate Word. The New Law is therefore an image of the final encounter with God in glory, which, however, is already available now, by virtue of the hypostatic union, in the Person of the Incarnate One. The worship of the Old Law was a symbol not only of truth, but also of Christ as the way leading to glorious revelation, while in the New Law the way has already been revealed and it is only the truth of glory that is symbolically announced. Christ is therefore the center not only of Scripture, but of the entire history of salvation (the time of the Church on its way to glory). Aquinas, accepting the axiom *Omnis Christi actio nostra est instructio*, assumes that Christ enlightens his disciples as to the eschatological goal and the way to achieve it.

The inspired scriptures teach “wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Scripture maintains a connection with the missions of the Divine Persons. Since the Divine Persons act in a manner that reflects their eternal origins, the Son reveals the Father, and the Holy Spirit reveals the Son. The Spirit is the cause of both the Incarnation and the origin of Scripture. Aquinas emphasizes the connection between the written word of God and the living Word of God. If Christ is the Son of God, then the word that comes from him is partly his likeness and therefore leads to Christ. In the Trinitarian reflection of the Universal Doctor, the Son is the Word that breathes Love. The Son’s message instructs the intellect and moves the heart. In this way, Scripture not only reflects the inner life of God, but also leads to that life.

7. According to Benedict XVI, the decisive factor in reconstructing the connections between the senses of Scripture is the transition from the letter to the spirit. Going beyond the letter presupposes taking into account the internal dynamics of the entire Bible and participating in the life of the Church as a life “by the spirit” (Gal 5:16). This process, which takes place in the power of the Holy Spirit, is connected with the freedom of the exegete (cf. 2 Cor 3:6, 17). Ratzinger emphasized the different nature of Scripture in the Old and New Covenants. It is not so much the new writings as the event of Christ interpreting the Old Testament writings that is decisive for the New Covenant (*gramma vs. pneuma*). The true content of Scripture is the Lord as Spirit; the Old Testament cannot remain confined to “literal exegesis,” but continues in the spiritual reality of Christ present in the Church in the Spirit.

Benedict XVI referred to Aquinas’ assertion that the letter of the Gospel without the grace of faith would bring death. Aquinas believes that the letter is what is written and external (including the Gospel), and the spirit is the healing grace – the New Law, unlike the Old, was written on the hearts of believers (2 Cor 3:3). It follows that, in Aquinas’ view, even more important than the distinction between the literal and spiritual senses is the distinction between

understanding Scripture according to its spiritual sense (*secundum spiritualem*) and its bodily sense (*secundum corporalem*). Even for the words of Christ, the appropriate sense is not the carnal (*carnalis*) but spiritual (*spiritualis*). Since we are dealing with the fullest Revelation in the New Covenant, the prerequisite for understanding Scripture is a spiritual understanding of the literal sense of the New Testament.

The transition from the letter to the spirit of scriptures is possible thanks to faith in Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:15). Aquinas claims that the veil resting on hearts is the dimness of the figures (*obscuritas figurarum*). Only Christians can understand spiritually what Jews understood physically, identifying figures with truth and treating words as proverbs. The medieval scholar points to the difference between the sensual and spiritual man. The former, in terms of cognitive power, judges God on the basis of bodily images, the letter of the law, or philosophical reasoning. When it comes to the appetitive power, he is attracted to things that appeal to sensual desire. The spiritual man, on the other hand, has the intellect enlightened and the will enkindled by the Spirit of God. In other words, *animalis homo* acts according to nature, and the nature of *spiritualis homo* has been elevated by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual reading of Scripture is realized only in the Holy Spirit.

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