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# THE INFLUENCE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE MARIAN ECUMENICAL EXCHANGE IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES:

A MEETING POINT OF DIALOGUE

*Virginia M. Kimball, S.T.D.\**

## I. INTRODUCTION: Scripture at Core of Marian Ecumenical Exchange

Today, as tensions and uncertainty rise in the world, the words of Christ ring out loudly in the hearts of Christians who are yearning for unity: "Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are" (John 17:11).<sup>1</sup> This passage inspired the title of John Paul II's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995)—in which the pope urged along ecumenical understanding and work. In his encyclical letter, John Paul admitted to areas that needed "fuller study" including, first and foremost, "the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God."<sup>2</sup>

In a list of five such areas needing more "study" were the Eucharist, ordination, the authority of the Pope and bishops, and, lastly, the Virgin Mary "as Mother of God and Icon of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Saint Joseph Edition of The New American Bible* (New York: Catholic Book Publ. Co., 1992).

<sup>2</sup> *Ut Unum Sint*, 79, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html), accessed August 28, 2011.

Church." These are still the major issues of the ecumenical forum where now truly the Bible has become the meeting point of dialogue. There remains divergence, of course, but convergence in many cases successfully occurs with reference to biblical texts and to the writings of the Fathers of the Church.

In an emerging interest of evangelicals, the point of reference for agreement always appears to be found in the biblical texts. In an issue of *Ecumenical Trends*, published by the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute in January 2010,<sup>3</sup> a recent report of the Pentecostal/Catholic dialogue hosted by the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS) pointed directly to the ecumenical strength found in reading the Fathers of the Church, as they in turn directly speak of the experience of being Christian through an interpretation of biblical passages. Dale M. Coulter summarized the significance of the SPS report, *On Becoming Christian: Insights from Scripture and the Patristic Writings with Some Contemporary Reflections*, thus:

In their own way, the reactions to the final report by the two presenters [Teresa Rossi of the Centro Pro Unione and Glen Menzies of North Central University] reveal just how far the international dialogue has come. Reading these reflections causes one to consider Teresa Rossi's claim that Pentecostal and Catholic participants have moved beyond mutual understanding, or as Glen Menzies puts it "an emerging convergence of perspectives," and call their respective communions to do the same.<sup>4</sup>

In the same issue of *Ecumenical Trends*, Rossi commented in depth on the SPS report. She described issues raised in the report: 1) conversion, 2) faith, 3) formation and discipleship, 4) Christian experience, and 5) Baptism in the Spirit and Christian initiation. In her comment on "conversion and faith," she noted: "... the reference to the Fathers of the Church is very

<sup>3</sup> *Ecumenical Trends* 39, no. 1 (Jan. 2010), a publication of the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute: A Ministry of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement.

<sup>4</sup> Dale M. Coulter, "Pentecostals and Catholics: On Learning to Read the Fathers Together," *Ecumenical Trends* 39, no. 1 (Jan. 2010): 1. [http://www.atonementfriars.org/ecutrends/ecumenical\\_trends\\_january\\_2010.pdf](http://www.atonementfriars.org/ecutrends/ecumenical_trends_january_2010.pdf), accessed August 28, 2011, 1.

appropriate since they played a relevant role in articulating the faith in a way that offers interesting links with the contemporary scene . . . since, I think, their times mirror very closely our times in important respects."<sup>5</sup> Rossi concluded: "An outstanding achievement reached by the *Report* is that it presents a variety of ways in which the faithful and the community receive the Holy Spirit and His gifts, witnessed in the biblical passages as well as in patristic sources (respectively nn. 201-207, 208-217) . . ."<sup>6</sup>

In the SPS report itself, there is biblical mention of Mary in the section "Faith and Christian Initiation." It is stated there that the gospels' portrayal of faith is "depicted as trusting acceptance of God's revelation,"<sup>7</sup> giving as an example Mary's fiat in Luke 1:38 and Elizabeth's words to Mary at the Visitation in Luke 1:45. Evangelical Tim Perry, in a 2008 article in *Theology Today*, based on his book *Mary for Evangelicals: Toward an Understanding of the Mother of Our Lord* (published in 2006), explained that it was the invitation extended in Vatican II and later Marian magisterial documents that prompted a new point of view by evangelicals. Evangelicals should consider Mary in more depth, he wrote: "... it ought to matter to evangelicals who wish to maintain a high christology, who share a commitment to biblical exposition as the basis of doctrine, who have a similarly shared commitment to an ecumenism of conviction."<sup>8</sup>

Perry praised the Second Vatican Council document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), for the way "the council grounds Marian teaching in the earliest (common) Christian faith through its frequent recourse to Holy Scriptures and the church fathers."<sup>9</sup> Perry appreciated the document's effort to

<sup>5</sup> Teresa Francesca Rossi, "On Becoming a Christian: Reflections and Insights," *Ecumenical Trends* 39, no. 1 (Jan. 2010): 2.

<sup>6</sup> Rossi, "On Becoming a Christian," 4.

<sup>7</sup> *On Becoming a Christian: Insights from Scripture and the Patristic Writings with Some Contemporary Reflections*, Report of the Fifth Phase of the International Dialogue between Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders and the Catholic Church (1998-2006), Section 60, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/eccl-comm-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20060101\\_becoming-a-christian\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/eccl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20060101_becoming-a-christian_en.html), accessed August 28, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Perry, "Evangelicals and Mary," *Theology Today* 65 (2008): 227.

<sup>9</sup> Perry, "Evangelicals and Mary," 229.

charge preachers and theologians "with articulating Marian themes circumspectly, following 'the study of Sacred Scripture, the Holy Fathers, the doctors and liturgy of the Church, and under the guidance of the Church's magisterium' (LG 67)." He mentions a phrase from *Marialis Cultus* (MC) that stated veneration for Mary should always have "a biblical imprint" (MC 29-30). To fellow evangelicals, Perry noted for those "whose major objection to Marian doctrine and devotion is its apparent lack of connection with the Bible, John Paul offers extended meditations on the Gospels of Luke, John, and the book of Acts, bolstered with some 204 further biblical citations and allusions."<sup>10</sup> This kind of reaction to the Catholic effort to connect biblical references with Marian devotion and doctrine has clearly impacted ecumenical exchange.

Proof-texting from biblical passages is disdained by all careful ecumenists. Therefore, the conversation on biblical texts and their interpretation turns to an awareness of exegetical method and resulting hermeneutics. What one biblical exegete might consider a standard interpretation of a biblical text is sometimes seen differently by another exegete. The most sensitive issues concerning the Virgin Mary as they relate to biblical texts concern her ever-virginity, her all-holiness or Immaculate Conception, her sinless life, her mediation, and her death or Assumption into heaven.

Currently, it is agreed that it is the onslaught of modernism and secularism or the growth of other aggressive world religious traditions that has awakened a deep yearning, need, and desire for Christian unity. Across all denominations in the ecumenical world, dialogues have gravitated primarily to scripture and its interpretation, the most recent being a dynamic interchange from Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) in talks sponsored by the late Father Richard John Neuhaus (†2009) and his *First Things*, a journal opening dialogue in the public square. At the heart of this dialogue arose the issues of biblical "inerrancy" and the very definition of "evangelical" itself. At the core is a deeper and more profound debate: the authority

<sup>10</sup> Perry, "Evangelicals and Mary," 230.

of Scripture versus the authority of Scripture coupled with Tradition, as John Paul II so wisely articulated in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*. In the latest ECT report, it becomes apparent that the evangelical Christian looks solely to the Bible as a foundation of faith concerning the mother of Christ. An "evangelical," according to the ECT, is the person who affirms faith in Christ and personally lives out the teachings of Christ, while basing all aspects of God's revelation solely on the Bible and in particular on the gospels. In the "Evangelical Word to Catholics" section of the ECT report titled "Do Whatever He Tells You: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Christian Faith and Life," evangelical participants wrote:

If Evangelicals are to recover a proper sense of Mary in the life of faith, it will be through the rediscovery of Mary of the Bible. Together, Catholics and Evangelicals should study the Bible's witness to Mary—the prophecies of Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 7:14, her annunciation, visitation, and purification, her witness to the miracles and ministry of Jesus, and her presence at Christmas, Calvary, and Pentecost.<sup>11</sup>

Roman Catholic faith and Eastern Orthodoxy, on the other hand, rely not only on scripture but also on tradition as a source of authority in interpreting scripture. Tradition is viewed as intrinsically related to scripture, for scripture is foundationally cradled itself in tradition: oral and written sources that are used by authors of the biblical texts. For these traditions, revelation or, as it is in Greek, *paradosis*, is received truth spoken by God in the tradition of early faith and in the biblical texts. According to patristic writer St. John of Damascus (676-749), "We will not remove the age-old landmarks which our fathers have set, but we keep the tradition we have received. For if we begin to erode the foundations of the Church even a little, in no time at all the whole edifice will fall to the ground."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, "Do Whatever He Tells You: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Christian Faith and Life," *First Things* (Nov. 2009). <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/10/do-whatever-he-tells-you-the-blessed-virgin-mary-in-christian-faith-and-life>, accessed August 28, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 60 (II, §12).

What do we have today in our midst as Christians? Since the Reformers first reacted to the extended and perhaps overarching authority of the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, established on the basis of "tradition," we have seen the development of a problem in employing the sacred texts of the Bible to understand the mother of Christ in the Catholic/Protestant dialogue. For over five centuries, Mary became symbolically attached to the tremendous rejection of papal authority and papal control seen as a malingering evil. As a result, most Protestants soon forgot their connection with Mary. Today, things are changing and the ecumenical dialogues centering on scripture, cautiously move toward the question of the inspiration of the Bible and how it is to be interpreted for Marian texts, in particular with a return to the patristic writings.

Contemporary biblical exegetes from all quarters have begun to recognize the need for situating the interpretation of scripture in tradition. In the 1985 study *The Bible in the Churches: How Various Christians Interpret the Scriptures*, Daniel Harrington points out that biblical exegetes are ever more mindful of the ecumenical environment and sensitivities:

The ways in which modern biblical scholars present the results of their study indicate that they themselves perceive some important ecumenical convergence. In addition to writing for their own ecclesial constituencies, they are conscious of participating in an interconfessional and international dialogue. This shows itself in the congresses and meetings that they attend regularly, the series and journals in which they publish their research, and the books and articles that they read and cite in their own works.<sup>13</sup>

Harrington also affirmed the convergences and divergences which still always exist, citing the dialogue between Catholic, evangelical and Lutheran biblical scholars. This divergence is rooted mainly in the historical settings of the interpreters,

<sup>13</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., "Conclusion: Convergence and Divergence," in *The Bible in the Churches: How Various Christians Interpret the Scriptures*, ed. Kenneth Hagen, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., Grant R. Osborne, and Joseph A. Burgess (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 146.

some theological questions of long-standing significance, and the process of interpretation itself.<sup>14</sup> As an example of "historical setting" he points to the liberation theologians in the Catholic world who have deep compassion for social ills, to the "revivalist and fundamentalist impulses of their [one's own] religious traditions in the evangelical world, and to the impact of scholasticism for Lutherans. In the arena of "theological questions" he refers to the "propositional versus personal" view of revelation, and the questions of inspiration and inerrancy.<sup>15</sup> Concerning "interpretation" he states: "The convergence stems mainly from the fact that these exegetes are working at the same texts and in the same basic ways. The divergence arises largely from the different historical settings in which these interpreters work, some very serious theological problems, and the process of interpretation itself."<sup>16</sup>

James G. Dunn writes clearly on the task of interpreting scripture, a book that would be helpful to those participating in ecumenical dialogue.

There is a surprisingly large measure of agreement between all the different traditions on a number of key issues: one need only think, for example, of the ecumenical creeds of the undivided church, or the relative success of the WCC's [World Council of Churches] Lima text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* [the so-called BEM document]. But more important for our present purposes, I would wish to emphasize that within the dialogue as a whole the original meaning as intended by the author and heard by his first readers should have normative status.<sup>17</sup>

Here, we see once again an appeal to scripture and to the early tradition. Dunn does not exclude the development of hermeneutics, but appreciates in addition that the faithful biblical readers through the centuries hear the texts in relation to their own lives, acceptable as long as it coincides with the apparent original meaning.

<sup>14</sup> Harrington, "Conclusion: Convergence and Divergence," 146.

<sup>15</sup> Harrington, "Conclusion: Convergence and Divergence," 147.

<sup>16</sup> Harrington, "Conclusion: Convergence and Divergence," 148.

<sup>17</sup> James G. Dunn, *The Living Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 20-21.



That is not to rule out other interpretations, other expressions of the word of God as heard through these texts. But it is to say that all interpretations should be able to justify themselves in the face of the author's original intention.<sup>18</sup>

Dunn warns that massaging the texts to one's own purposes, such as particular theological positions, is wrong. The work of exegetes is needed to prevent this. He states succinctly: "Only exegesis can prevent eisegesis."<sup>19</sup> The use of biblical texts becomes the core tool for ecumenical dialogue, but intrinsic in this use must be a mutually accepted view on inspiration and interpretation.

## II. SENSES OF SCRIPTURE

St. Thomas Aquinas described four senses of Sacred Scripture, distinguishing first and foremost between the literal sense and the spiritual sense. The literal sense can be understood to impart a meaning that is immediate and drawn directly from reading the words written by the authors. The extension to spiritual meaning comes when words are used metaphorically or allegorically, or searched for moral content by readers.

Commonly understood today, there are four senses with which to interpret biblical texts: 1) the literal sense, 2) the allegorical sense, 3) the tropological/moral sense, and 4) the anagogical/eschatological sense. In the history of patristic interpretation it is known that the ancient School of Antioch stressed the literal sense (e.g., John Chrysostom and Theodoret) in contrast to the School of Alexandria (e.g., Origen and Clement of Alexandria) which embraced the spiritual sense. These categories were not strict and often the patristic writers were known to utilize more than one sense of scripture. For example, Athanasius (Alexandrian School) demonstrated the use of both the literal and spiritual senses using the historical literal sense primarily in doctrinal and apologetic writing and the spiritual sense in his biblical commentaries. Chrysostom, following the tradition of Antioch, did, however, also accept tropological sense for interpreting biblical texts.

<sup>18</sup> Dunn, *The Living Word*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Dunn, *The Living Word*, 21.

In contemporary Catholic biblical exegesis, the process of interpreting the Bible is characterized by "actualizing and inculturating the biblical message, as well as to various uses of the inspired text in liturgy, in *lectio divina*, in pastoral ministry and in the ecumenical movement,"<sup>20</sup> according to the Pontifical Biblical Commission. The ecumenical approach, according to the commission, should include study of the Bible:

Most of the issues which ecumenical dialogue has to confront are related in some way to the interpretation of biblical texts. . . . Although it cannot claim to resolve all these issues by itself, biblical exegesis is called upon to make an important contribution in the ecumenical area. A remarkable degree of progress has already been achieved. Through the adoption of the same methods and analogous hermeneutical points of view, exegetes of various Christian confessions have arrived at a remarkable level of agreement in the interpretation of Scripture, as is shown by the text and notes of a number of ecumenical translations of the Bible . . .<sup>21</sup>

A note appended to the document explains the meaning of "exegetical method" as "a group of scientific procedures employed in order to explain the texts."<sup>22</sup> In addition, the document treats directly the two general senses, literal and spiritual, claiming that modern textual criticism "deepened the meaning" in ways not possible in ancient days.<sup>23</sup> And, in some way, the contemporary idea of *sensus plenior* embraces the more ancient ideas of the spiritual senses, an approach that will be used in discussion concerning the Virgin Mary:

The term "fuller sense" (*sensus plenior*), which is relatively recent, has given rise to discussion. The fuller sense is defined as a deeper meaning of the text, intended by God but not clearly expressed by the human

<sup>20</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, IV. "Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church," <http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/pbcinter.htm>, accessed March 18, 1994, Part IV.

<sup>21</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, IV. C. 4. "In Ecumenism."

<sup>22</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Conclusion."

<sup>23</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, II. "Hermeneutical Questions," B. 3.

author. Its existence in the biblical text comes to be known when one studies the text in the light of other biblical texts that utilize it or in its relationship with the internal development of revelation. . . . For example, the context of Matthew 1:23 gives a fuller sense to the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 in regard to the *almah* who will conceive, by using the translation of the Septuagint (*parthenos*): "The *virgin* will conceive."

In a word, one might think of the "fuller sense" as another way of indicating the spiritual sense of a biblical text in the case where the spiritual sense is distinct from the literal sense. It has its foundation in the fact that the Holy Spirit, principal author of the Bible, can guide human authors in the choice of expressions in such a way that the latter will express a truth the fullest depths of which the authors themselves do not perceive. This deeper truth will be more fully revealed in the course of time—on the one hand, through further divine interventions which clarify the meaning of texts and, on the other, through the insertion of texts into the canon of Scripture. In these ways there is created a new context, which brings out fresh possibilities of meaning that had lain hidden in the original context.<sup>24</sup>

To critics, this *sensus plenior* in its basic meaning can lead to the development of doctrine as understood by a Church hierarchy in the development and definition of doctrine. For the Protestant . . . this is unacceptable. But, on the other hand, if the meaning of the phrase "which the authors themselves do not perceive" refers to an ongoing plan of salvation by God which may not necessarily be understood by the biblical author, such as the reference to a young woman who will bear a child (Isaiah 7:14), then the Protestant interpreter could agree.

### III. TEXTUAL CRITICISM

In surveying the contemporary forms of exegesis, there are many ideas of various modes of biblical criticism. They generally divide into two categories: looking at the meaning in "front of the text" and exploring the meaning "behind the text." A straightforward and useful breakdown is provided by Michael J. Gorman in his *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, divided into three approaches: synchronic, diachronic and existential,

<sup>24</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, II. "Hermeneutical Questions," B. 3.

summarized below. These methods would be utilized in addition to the patristic tradition.<sup>25</sup> All these methods will be described as follows:

### A. Tradition Criticism/Typology—Patristic Use

As stated previously, the earliest schools of Antioch and Alexandria dominated the ideas of interpreting scripture by introducing the concept of both the literal sense and the spiritual senses (moral, allegorical, and anagogical/eschatological). These were not strict categories, as many predominant patristic writers tended toward either the literal or the spiritual sense but often would utilize more senses. Each of these approaches offers perhaps a specific tool for approaching a particular Marian biblical text. In general, one could say that it is these senses that govern scriptural references in Vatican II and the later Roman Catholic documents on Mary which have interested evangelicals. When looking at the approach of evangelical exegesis, it could often be categorized most easily in these senses, particularly the literal and spiritual or moral senses. The recent statement by Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) reflects this: "Our purpose . . . is to examine anew, as Evangelicals and Catholics together, the place of Mary in Christian faith and life. In doing so, we acknowledge the primary authority of Holy Scripture."<sup>26</sup>

### B. Synchronic Approach

These exegetical tools look at a biblical text as it appears, analyzed in terms of the world at the time of writing. Other terms for this approach are the "narrative-critical," "social-scientific," or "social-rhetorical" approach.

#### 1. Literary Criticism

Known also as "genre-form analysis," this exegetical tool looks at the literary type of a passage. Knowing that a

<sup>25</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005), 12-19.

<sup>26</sup> A Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, "Do Whatever He Tells You: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Christian Faith and Life," *First Things* (Nov. 2009).

particular passage appears to be liturgical or an ancient hymn or song of praise, for instance, lends more to its interpretation. This would be important in interpreting the song of Mary, the Magnificat, in Luke 1:46-56. Realizing that this may have been a "song of joy and thanks for God's gift of a child" and recognition of God's loving kindness and care, leads one to see the connection, as Ignace de la Potterie did, to Hannah's song.<sup>27</sup>

Protestant scholar Beverly Gaventa at Princeton Theological Seminary, a well-known spokesperson in the ecumenical world, broke new ground with *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*. In this book, she states quite clearly that she is employing the "literary quest for Mary."

The theological quest for Mary begins with the biblical texts but quickly moves beyond them to construct an understanding of Mary and her place in the larger framework of God's dealings with humankind. The historical quest begins with biblical texts but looks behind them for any historical data they might yield about Mary and the individuals or communities who produced the Gospels themselves. What I undertake in this study is, by contrast, a literary quest. . . . I am interested in the ways in which these writers portray Mary as a literary character and the roles she plays in their narratives. Rather than looking "behind" or "beyond" the text, [catalogued here as the diachronic approach], I am concerned with the text itself, the way it works, the world it creates. The "glimpses" of Mary I seek, therefore, are primarily literary rather than theological or historical.<sup>28</sup>

Gaventa conceives how early Christian writers portray Mary as "a character and the role or roles she plays in their representations of the Jesus story."<sup>29</sup> In her work, and through these "glimpses," Gaventa discovers "some important aspects of what it means to be a disciple of Christ: living with vulnerability, reflecting with care on the advent of Jesus Christ, and witnessing God's actions in the world. In that sense, Mary remains

<sup>27</sup> See: Ignace de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (New York: Alba House, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 19-20.

<sup>29</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses*, 20.

a model for all Christians.”<sup>30</sup> For Gaventa, Mary is not so much an historical person who impacts the life of Christians then or now, but a literary character which is, as she defines it, “an artificial construct.” She explains: “While literary characters are necessarily imitative of ‘real’ people, or else the reader would find them unintelligible, literary characters are also necessarily ‘artificial.’”<sup>31</sup>

## 2. Narrative Criticism

This exegetical approach considers a passage as an account or a story of events. The obvious application here to Marian texts would be the birth narratives of Luke and Matthew, in Luke 1 and 2 and Matthew 1 and 2, and the Passion Narratives as they occur in all four gospels. In terms of *sensus plenior*, exegetes collapse Luke and Matthew into one narrative. Mary’s role in the Passion narrative accounts is viewed according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, although a synchronic approach would not necessarily be looking at the relationship of the Synoptics [Mark, Matthew and Luke—Matthew and Luke using Mark and appearing to use common source material, their own material, and a sayings source] separately from the Gospel of John.

## 3. Rhetorical Criticism

This approach involves looking at the texts in terms of techniques used for persuasion. Some exegetes will look at Matthew and find that his consistent reference to the Hebrew scriptures is used to offer an apologetic utilizing the Israelites’ expectation of a messiah. As an example: “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel” (Matt. 2:6),<sup>32</sup> which is a summary of a messianic reference in Micah 5:2. And we find a text immediately after this one referring to the gold, frankincense and myrrh which refers to Isaiah: “Caravans of camels shall fill you,

<sup>30</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses*, 131.

<sup>31</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> *New American Bible*.

dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the LORD" (Isa. 60:6).<sup>33</sup> Matthew's gospel is filled with such allusions to the Hebrew scriptures, seemingly as rhetoric of Christ's kingship and divinity.

#### 4. *Lexical, Grammatical, and Syntactical Analysis*

This exegetical tool examines words, phrases and idioms for their grammatical and syntactical use. Such a case is applied to the Lukan-constructed word *kecharitomene* in the Annunciation account. Another example where this tool would be employed would be in the use of the word "woman" at the Wedding Feast of Cana and at the cross, in John 2:1-2 and John 19:26. We will examine these a little later. Useful for this kind of textual analysis is the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, but abridged in one volume.<sup>34</sup> A fuller version is available in two volumes, one edited by Gerhard Kittel and the other edited by Gerhard Friedrich. This important resource provides a careful and detailed analysis of the Greek words of the New Testament as they are used in a particular context (which can differ from biblical writer to biblical writer) and their relationship to the Hebrew of the Hebrew scriptures.

#### 5. *Semantic or Discourse Analysis*

This is the exegetical tool that uses modern methods of evaluation of texts in order to find inter-relationships in biblical writings with the overall implication of discourse. This analysis is probably not too helpful for Marian texts because references to her are limited and she never gives a speech. One might be tempted to apply this to her Magnificat hymn, if it is to be understood as a public statement.

<sup>33</sup> *New American Bible*.

<sup>34</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1985).

### 6. Social-Scientific Criticism

Here we have an analysis of the social description, a social-scientific analysis that stands in front of the text and can illuminate it. Until recently, there was not adequate study of the social standing of a Mediterranean, Hebrew woman. Today, studies examine in particular the social standing and day-to-day life of a first-century woman, either reflecting back from the study of Mishnah or by newly published archaeological finds, such as discovered at the Qumran site by the Dead Sea. Jewish scholars are researching the birth and nurturing culture of first-century Hebrew life which may in turn open up new depth to the Nativity account. Biblical scholar Karen King of Harvard and others now reject the cataloguing of apocryphal writings as being totally Gnostic. They find qualities in the writings that are representative of a Jewish mystical environment in the first centuries.

Beverly Gaventa does utilize the social sense in her study as well, although with caution as to the true historic value that reading later Rabbinic literature can shed on the lives of first-century women. "For example, the Mishnah, a collection of Jewish legal tradition, is first committed to written form about 200-250 C.E. The Babylonian Talmud comes into being several centuries later still, not before 500 C.E."<sup>35</sup> Always, and apparently, hesitant to assign historical nature to scriptural texts, she writes: "While those later writings do contain information drawn from earlier periods, separating information that is historically reliable from that which is unreliable is virtually impossible."<sup>36</sup>

### C. Diachronic Approach (Historical-Critical Method)

These tools for exegesis look at passages "across time," including the awareness of their origin and development. This overall approach can also be called the "historical-critical method" which takes a longer view of the texts. For many biblical exegetes, this is a most important tool that directly aids the ecumenist, many times utilized in conjunction with the spiritual sense.

<sup>35</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses*, 5-6.

<sup>36</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses*, 6.



### 1. Textual Criticism

The textual analysis perhaps has aided the most in textual criticism. When readers move from one translation to another, there can be confusion as to what the original text actually says, and more exactly which manuscript tradition translators are using. Because there are no "autographs," original manuscripts for the New Testament writings, translators and exegetes must decide which manuscript tradition they will use.

### 2. Historical Linguistics

Here the analysis looks at words as they develop. As mentioned, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* specifically addresses this study. For Marian texts, this is important in the translation and interpretation of such words as "blessed" in the Annunciation passage and the Magnificat, "virgin" as it morphed from the Hebrew *alma* to the Greek *parthenos*, and the transition from the Greek *chaire* (best translated as "rejoiced") to the Latin *ave* (usually translated as "hail").

When the angel approaches the betrothed but unmarried Mary, she is—according to Hebrew culture—a "virgin," as indicated in the Hebrew word *alma*. Because the cultural meaning behind the text is a young woman, come of age but not pledged to a man, there develops a transfer through translation into the Greek "*parthenos*," a term that has Hellenistic cultural inference far wider than the Hebrew and usually meaning "consecrated virgin." The angel announces: "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28).<sup>37</sup> The phrase "Greetings, favored one" is derived from the Greek word *chaire*, actually best translated as "Rejoice," built on the word *chara*, meaning joy. This greeting is followed by a phrase, *kecharitomene*, a word constructed by Luke. This one word, which becomes a phrase in English, is built around the root word for "joy." Added to it is a form of the verb meaning to remain, indicating that Mary remains in the joy of God, spiritually interpreted in this form of exegesis to mean an ongoing relationship, in

<sup>37</sup> As often translated into English directly from the original Greek in the New Testament text.

eschatological terms, of trust and love between God and this young woman. Bromiley's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* explains:

The [*chara*] group is common only in Luke, which refers to joy at finding what is lost (15:5ff.), at one's name being written in heaven (10:20), at the coming of the savior (1:14), and at the acts of Jesus (13:17). The mood of the people is one of joy in 18:43, as is that of the disciples after the ascension in 24:42.<sup>38</sup>

Ignace de la Potterie exegetes the angel's greetings:

... it is interesting to verify that in the Septuagint the formula "Chaire" always appears in a context where Zion is invited to the messianic joy in the perspective of the future (Jl 2:21-23; Zp 2:14; Zc 9:9; cf. Lm 4:21). In the announcement to Mary, the angel utilizes the formula which the prophets employ to invite the eschatological Zion to rejoice in the salvation which God accords her.<sup>39</sup>

In its direct translation in the Magnificat we often find the word "favor": "For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant / Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48).<sup>40</sup> The word "favor" itself in the original Greek does not exist in the passage but is extracted from a verbal form of *epi-blepo* (from the Koine Greek) meaning "to look upon with care; show more respect to,"<sup>41</sup> indicating a kind of special relationship of care and protection. The study of these words as they are translated becomes critical to the ecumenical discussion on Mary as "blessed" and "favored by God."

For example, Nancy J. Duff raises an issue on the translation of "favor" in her contribution to a collection of papers in

<sup>38</sup> Bromiley (trans.), *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, 726.

<sup>39</sup> La Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> This translation is taken from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Third Edition, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, An Ecumenical Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Compare this translation with that in the *New American Bible*: "For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed."

<sup>41</sup> Barclay M. Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart, Germany: United Bible Societies, 1971), 68.

*Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary.* From the use of the phrases "favored one" and "full of grace," Protestants worry that "Roman Catholics have built an elaborate theology around [Mary]."<sup>42</sup> Duff's interpretation is this: "For Protestants in the Reformed tradition Mary can be understood as 'favored' only because for her, as for every child of God, God's saving grace is bestowed upon a sinner."<sup>43</sup> Duff develops the idea that "the notion of perfection or ideal undermines the scandal of the manger and the cross."<sup>44</sup> So much depends, then, on the etymology and interpretation of the original biblical words.

The word *makariouein*, translated "blessed," truly means "happy" or "filled with joy." Consider that "the special feature in the New Testament [of the forms of *makarios*] is use of the term for the distinctive joy which comes through participation in the divine kingdom."<sup>45</sup> This exegetical tool, then, can aid the Protestant in understanding the term "Blessed Virgin Mary," placing Mary not on an untouchable, high status as queen but as someone truly loved and nurtured by God, and truly filled with joy! Ecumenists, in dialogues on Mary, should highlight the sensitivity to the meaning of the words "blessed," "virgin," and "favored," since for many non-Catholics and non-Orthodox these words form a great impediment to understanding the mother of Christ.

### 3. Form Criticism

This analysis looks critically at the origin of a passage and whether it was generated from an oral or written tradition, the how and when the text was generated. Here we see the analysis of *sitz im leben*, the original life setting of a passage. Easily, we can see how form criticism can or might inform the Annunciation passages in both Luke (to Mary) and Matthew (to Joseph) and the Magnificat. Are Luke and Matthew drawing from written testimonies to God's announcements to Mary and

<sup>42</sup> Nancy J. Duff, "Mary, the Servant of the Lord: Christian Vocation at the Manger and the Cross," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 59.

<sup>43</sup> Duff, "Mary, the Servant of the Lord," 60.

<sup>44</sup> Duff, "Mary, the Servant of the Lord," 60.

<sup>45</sup> Bromiley (trans.), *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, 548.

Joseph or are they drawing from sayings and orally related tradition? Did Mary really sing the Magnificat or is the evangelist merely placing it on her lips for theological reasons, or relating her song mystically to the song of Hannah?

#### **4. Tradition Criticism**

Did something happen to a passage in its transmission from oral tradition to written tradition, or even from one mouth to another? Do the pericopes (evident, small units which most scholars think came from oral sources) in the gospels always contain an individual healing or teaching, or are they ever conflations of multiple sources? Although most exegetes would admit this is a speculative exercise, the question could be asked about the Passion narratives and the many "Marys" mentioned. Was there a standard list of women, whom everyone knew were "there" at the cross, or were there various reports, and the lists did or did not get combined?

#### **5. Source Criticism**

Here the analysis examines the sources that may have been used in a scriptural writing. Is the source theory of the gospels helpful in seeing behind the text in the accounts concerning Mary? What did Matthew mean in his account of Jesus asking "Who are my brothers and sisters?" In Mark, Jesus merely looks about at those seated around him, and in Matthew he points to his disciples, which is an action that leads some to interpret this as a slur against his family. Is it legitimate to draw so much from what Matthew does with the apparent source from Mark, utilizing the theory that supports an answer to the synoptic problem?

#### **6. Redaction Criticism**

This is a common tool for exegetes today for determining the purpose of the individuality of the gospel writers, in particular. For example, why are the genealogies in Matthew and Luke different? Why does Luke, who tradition tells us knew Mary well, not know or write about the escape to Egypt? Why do Matthew and Luke tell the announcement of the Incarnation through two different people—Joseph and Mary? Also, this tool may help to address the use of the prophets in the gospel accounts.

Old Testament scholar Katharine Doob Sakenfeld addresses the genealogical list in Matthew in her contribution, "Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the Wife of Uriah: The Company Mary Keeps in Matthew's Gospel." Her conclusion is not, as it was in patristic days, that these women were all "sinners," meaning God can call all people to service, but rather: "[T]hese four women anticipate Mary's pregnancy, and indeed the life of her son Jesus, a pregnancy and a life that did not 'fit' with human expectations, even though they were the work of God."<sup>46</sup>

### **7. Historical Criticism**

Did the Wedding Feast of Cana actually occur as we read it in the Gospel of John? Or was John using the concept of a wedding as a sign of the opening ministry of Jesus? This analysis asks if there is an historical reality in an account or if it is to be understood as part of a theological expression. This is important in ecumenical dialogue since Cana is used as an example of the mediation of Mary—as the mother goes to her Son to grant help. Was the event real, or, in the case of Revelation, will the appearance of a woman in the sky actually happen?

## **D. Existential Approach**

This approach speaks to the transformative, experiential, and spiritual sense of the biblical texts. In many ways, this approach leads back to the patristic idea of the spiritual senses: allegorical, moral, and anagogical or eschatological senses. This approach looks to see how the texts relate to real life.

### **1. Canonical Criticism**

In this form of criticism there is always a principle that the passages of the Bible are part of a larger canon. Themes such as "covenant," "the call of the prophet and the people of God," and the purpose of God in creation of the world and mankind

<sup>46</sup> Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, "Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the Wife of Uriah: The Company Mary Keeps in Matthew's Gospel," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 30.

permeate all the other writings of scripture. This, indeed, will highlight the importance of the Annunciation as Mary would have recognized the unfolding of the fullness of covenant, her call by God, and the purpose of creation. This may very well substantiate the exegesis of Genesis 3:15 (the woman whose heel will crush the head of Satan) and Isaiah 7:14 (the virgin who will bear a son) as relating to Mary. Handel in his *Messiah* cantata certainly took the canonical approach in understanding Isaiah.

Timothy George, Dean of Beeson Divinity School and a Baptist, in his contribution to *Mary, Mother of God*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, comments:

Does evangelicalism have a place for the Blessed Virgin Mary or, like Knox of the galleys, have we thrown her overboard once and for all? Without compromising the Reformation principles of *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura*, can we evangelicals understand and honor Mary in ways, as our [the seminary] brochure puts it, "that are Scripturally based, evangelically motivated, liturgically appropriate, and ecumenically sensitive"? This is the dilemma of the two Johns. Can John Knox and John Chrysostom stand side-by-side with shoulders touching on the same pulpit—to say nothing of John Calvin and John of Damascus?<sup>47</sup>

The method that Timothy George embraces is to find Marian typology of the biblical texts seen in the light of the canon. He uses "Daughter of Zion and the Eve-Mary parallel," "the Virgin Birth," "Mary Theotokos," "Handmaiden of the Word," and "Mother of the Church"—all based on biblical and patristic footing—to represent five Marian motifs seen through evangelical eyes. "Mary stands, along with John the Baptist, at a unique point of intersection in the biblical narrative, between the Old and New Covenants,"<sup>48</sup> he wrote.

Lutheran David S. Yeago, in the same collection of papers, also sees Mary portrayed in scripture as more than just a character. "Mary therefore does not figure in the story of salvation

<sup>47</sup> Timothy George, "The Blessed Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective," in *Mary, the Mother of God*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2004), 101.

<sup>48</sup> George, "The BVM in Evangelical Perspective," 104.

only through the bare fact of her pregnancy; her pregnancy is located within a context of covenant and communion, of God's election and promise, and the faith these evoke."<sup>49</sup> More and more we are witnessing the way biblical texts and good exegesis form a solid core of dialogue on Mary, the mother of Christ.

## **2. Theological Exegesis/Spiritual Reading**

Finally, we come to an approach that wishes to extract a theological meaning from the texts. It is here, in the ecumenical exchange, that one has to see that tradition can inform this spiritual or theological reading. Tradition, from the earliest of ages in Christianity, held the ever-virginity of Mary. Can this understanding be valid in interpreting the lists of brothers and sisters of Jesus? St. Paul speaks of divinization of the human who takes on faith and develops a deep relationship in and with the Holy Spirit. Can this theologically be understood to explain the Immaculate Conception?

## **3. Embodiment or Actualization**

This sense has to do with hermeneutics and the *praxis* or life transformation and activity that come from the biblical passages. This can include the reading of scripture, reflection and meditation upon it. With the help of the Holy Spirit, deep mystical meanings can be experienced by the Christian reading the Bible. *Lectio Divina* and devotional or liturgical prayer interpret and live vividly in the life of a practicing Christian.

## **4. Advocacy, Liberationist Exegesis, Ideological Criticism**

Lastly, hermeneutics expand from the texts. In the case of Marian texts, the faithful can draw forth Mary as model of a disciple, in fact the disciple of disciples. Men and women alike form patterns of life based on her model—both in religious communities or in groups of Marian enthusiasts, for example,

<sup>49</sup> David S. Yeago, "The Presence of Mary in the Mystery of the Church," in *Mary, the Mother of God*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2004), 66.

praying the Rosary in Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Lutheran churches, or singing the Akathistos hymn in the Eastern Orthodox churches. Women searching for a truly Christian and wholesome way to womanhood in the model and wisdom of Mary will read the Marian biblical texts for inspiration.

A striking example of this kind of liberationist exegetical approach is used by Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan in the *Protestant Perspectives on Mary* collection. She looks at the following categories: "Womanist Theological Analysis: A Liberatory, Revolutionary Model"; "Woman [Jungian archetype of feminine], Rollin' on the River [song by Tina Turner]: There's Something about Proud Mary"; "Woman Chosen by God, Shaped by Humanity"; "Women Wonderful and Complex: Mary on Screen"; "Winnowing the Manna: Proud Mary Unveiled through an Opaque Lens." She concludes her piece with: "She [Mary] is womanist: she not only survives but transcends. She makes out of rags quilts that get hung in the Smithsonian. She makes soul food that becomes haute cuisine. Admired by some, and feared by others, Proud Mary is who she is, without apology."<sup>50</sup> For some Christian denominations, this is nonsense. For women who are marginalized it is remarkable and meaningful.

Overall, these forms of exegetical analysis can overlap each other and should always be held in balance with the *sensus plenior*. In a 1993 issue of *America: The National Catholic Weekly*, John Donahue, S.J., addressed biblical scholarship fifty years after *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, describing how this encyclical of Pius XII was revisited in one "of the great dramas of Vatican II" and brought to the level of a conciliar dogmatic constitution in *Dei Verbum*.<sup>51</sup> Although there seemed to be acceptance of the historical-critical methods of exegesis, Fr. Donahue suggested that there is now a reactionary movement by "neo-integrist" authors who are concerned that these forms

<sup>50</sup> Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "Proud Mary: Contextual Constructions of a Divine Diva," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 83.

<sup>51</sup> John Donahue, "A Journey Remembered: Catholic Biblical Scholarship 50 Years After *Divino Afflante Spiritu*," *America: The National Catholic Weekly*, September 18, 1993, 8.



of analysis are too focused on human elements. In particular, he mentions Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., professor at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, who has consistently argued that "historical criticism does not provide an adequate hermeneutical foundation for a religious appropriation of the Bible."<sup>52</sup> This might also be said in relation to the use of the Bible in ecumenical exchange which most often seems to be hermeneutical, even though presented within the context of dialogue on doctrinal aspects.

### **E. Use of Scripture in Major Ecumenical Reports**

To look unilaterally at all major ecumenical reports is not possible in the space of this paper. However, we will sample some of the reports and ecumenical work to see how exegesis on biblical passages actually has been done. Scriptural interpretation throughout these reports appears to be generally "literal" in the patristic biblical sense, and sometimes uses "historical narrative" and literary criticism in the exegetical approaches. A few examples follow:

#### **1. Use of Scripture in Dombes**

The *Groupe des Dombes* was a French-speaking ecumenical group whose members studied and prayed for two decades, devoting the period of 1991 to 1997 to reflection and discussion on Mary's role in salvation. As an example of their work, in the treatment of the Annunciation, the Dombes' study appears to have paid attention to the linguistic exegesis and then concluded with the spiritual sense of the passage.

150. Mary is described as a *parthenos* in accordance with the Greek text of Isaiah 7:14. The word signified, first of all, a young unmarried woman. But it is used here to mean a virgin, and this is confirmed by Mary's objection that she does not "know" any man, that is, that she has not had conjugal relations and that the announced birth will be in fact from a virgin. Mary is, however, said to be espoused to Joseph, a fact that connects her with the posterity of king David....

<sup>52</sup> Donahue, "A Journey Remembered," 10.

152. The angel greets Mary as one to whom grace *has been* given: the Lord is with her. The passive expression, "filled with grace," emphasizes the point that grace in Mary is the result of a gift freely given and accepted.<sup>53</sup>

In this example, the actual return to the original language of the biblical text becomes a pivotal tool.

## 2. Use of Scripture in Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue

In the eighth round of theological talks between Lutherans and Catholics in the United States, spanning 1983 to 1990, the report *One Mediator, the Saints and Mary* indicated that this dialogue, too, depended highly on biblical accounts. Similarly, it approached the biblical account of the Annunciation using historical linguistics.

Mary herself is *kecharitōmenē*, "highly favored woman," chosen by God to bear this extraordinary child through "the power of the Most High"; and to this singular election she responds with her obedient *fiat* (1:26-38 . . .).<sup>54</sup>

Overall, this document tends to take the literal meaning and, in particular, the narrative approach to the Marian biblical texts:

(155) Overall, in the New Testament writings, there is a variety of portraits of Mary. Though Mark's picture of her is somewhat negative, Matthew's is less so, Luke changes the picture more dramatically, and John is most positive. As the tradition about her develops from this New Testament matrix, there is a rich and imaginative unfolding of a new body of doctrine in the second and following centuries.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Alain Blancy and Maurice Jourjon and the Dombes Group, *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 61-62. A footnote (p. 148) attached to section 152 states: "9. Mary is *kecharitōmenē*, 'filled with grace,' not 'full of grace,' this being the prerogative of the Word made flesh, who is 'full of grace and truth' (*plērēs charitos kai alētheias*, John 1:14)."

<sup>54</sup> *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*, ed. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 79 (150).

<sup>55</sup> *One Mediator*, 81.

### 3. Use of Scripture in ARCIC

In order to follow through with our example of understanding the Annunciation, we find that the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue report "Mary, Grace and Hope in Christ: The Seattle Statement" tackled much the same issue of textual analysis. The conclusion appears as doctrinal:

In the annunciation story, the angel calls Mary the Lord's "favoured one" (Greek *kecharitomene*, a perfect participle meaning "one who has been and remains endowed with grace") in a way that implies a prior sanctification by divine grace with a view to her calling.<sup>56</sup>

Of course, the doctrinal exegesis drawn out here from this textual study would not be accepted by the Eastern Orthodox tradition, but indicates a coming-together of Anglican and Catholic dogma. What governs the exegesis here, then, is an apparent background, perhaps even both the "historical setting" and concern for "theological problems" (as suggested by Fr. Daniel Harrington), which all exist behind the text of Roman Catholic tradition.

### 4. Authors (a Sampling): ESBVM Publications

The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary (ESBVM), created to advance the study at various levels of the place of the Virgin Mary in the church, under Christ, and of related theological questions, proceeds in the light of such study to promote ecumenical devotion. The Society's aim is to show that Christians of many traditions may find a focus in the search for unity. Instead of issuing reports, there have been, and continue to be, a series of collections of papers presented by a diverse representation of people. The Society was founded in 1967, when a group of friends of several Christian traditions, recognizing the need, met to discuss ways of ensuring that this

<sup>56</sup> Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ: The Seattle Statement," 2 February 2004, in *Growth in Agreement III: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 1998-2005*, ed. Jeffrey Gros, FSC; Thomas F Best; and Lorelei F Fuchs, SA (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co.; WCC Publications/Geneva, 2007), 88 (no. 16).

vital element in religious experience should be given an adequate place in current dialogue. Among these friends, Martin Gillett, a Roman Catholic layman, thereupon dedicated the remaining years of his life to promoting an ecumenical understanding of Mary's place in the life of the Church. The Society quickly prospered, attracting membership from Church leaders, scholars and pastors, lay theologians, and Christian people from all walks of life. Looking at the Society's published papers, it is interesting to see that the exchange was less scripturally oriented in the beginning but now more and more tends toward scriptural foundations.<sup>57</sup>

*a) Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, 1982, edited by Alberic Stackpoole, O.S.B.

This collection included two contributed papers on scriptural topics: "The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Bible," by Dom Ralph Russell, O.S.B., followed by a response of agreement between speakers, a reply, and further record of panel discussions. For an example, the exchange here on the Annunciation is indicative of the emerging need to examine scripture and for honesty on how this is done. For, in particular, a reply by John de Satgé [Anglican], recognizing that *Lumen Gentium* had attempted to relate doctrine to scripture, pointed out that he thought the document went from apparent literal meaning to canonical meaning:

By connecting Annunciation and the cross, LG 'teams up' St Luke with St John, for St John has no Annunciation and St Luke does not mention Mary's presence at the cross. No texts are cited and the biblical authority is evidently that of the Canon of Scripture as a whole. Satisfactory treatment of our problem will therefore involve discussion of the post-NT Church of Tradition and of the work of the Holy Spirit through the events of history.<sup>58</sup>

And to this, Rev. John McHugh [member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission] commented that he agreed with De

<sup>57</sup> See the ESBVM's website for publications at [www.esbvm.org](http://www.esbvm.org).

<sup>58</sup> John de Satgé, Reply to "Scripture, Tradition and the Marian Texts," in *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, ed. Alberic Stackpoole, O.S.B. (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow Inc., 1982), 56.

Satgé and suggested: "Now if we had time to discuss either or both of these doctrines [Immaculate Conception and the Assumption], I should start by assuming that post-biblical tradition is a legitimate development of Scripture and then try to trace a path from NT times to the present day."<sup>59</sup>

***b) Mary in Doctrine and Devotion, 1989***

This collection of papers included an interesting presentation and apologetic on the Immaculate Conception and its effect on ecumenical relationships by Canon John McHugh. In reference to the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, he wrote:

The Orthodox churches would say that these two doctrines, however true, are *not* contained in Holy Scripture or in apostolic tradition, and therefore are *not* 'revealed truths.' Therefore both Pope Pius IX and Pope Pius XII were guilty of very grave error in proclaiming them to be such. Therefore the Pope of Rome is not, in the sense in which he claims to be, infallible.<sup>60</sup>

These are harsh words written by a Roman Catholic explaining—in his words—why the total reliance on the Bible is problematic. It also demonstrates how it is problematic for a person of one denomination to characterize the position of a denomination not his own, for it is hard—if not impossible—to find an Orthodox scholar who would challenge papal infallibility on this basis.

***c) Mary for Everyone, 1997***

An example of the diversity that can come from biblical exegesis is seen in an article by William J. Bridcut, an evangelical member of the church of Ireland and a longtime ESBVM member, taken from this ESBVM collection. He tackles the issue of

<sup>59</sup> Rev. John McHugh, "Reply" [to De Satgé's Reply], in *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, 57.

<sup>60</sup> Very Rev. Canon John McHugh, "The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception: reflections on a problem in ecumenical dialogue," in *Mary in Doctrine and Devotion*, ed. Alberic Stackpoole, O.S.B., with Geoffrey and Jill Pinnock (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 26.

Mary as "Ever-Virgin." The biblical passages he addresses are numerous, among them the reference in Matthew's gospel that Joseph did not know Mary "until she had borne a son." Looking at the imperfect tense of the verb "to know," he concludes: "Matthew writes like one who knew that the 'brothers' mentioned later on were Mary's children, but did not want to say so explicitly at this point."<sup>61</sup> He looks at Matthew 12:46-50 and the corresponding Mark 3:31-35 where Jesus speaks of disciples as his brothers and sisters. He does not accept any idea that Mary had pledged to be a virgin all her life and finds no biblical evidence of that. He concludes: "Nor will we be embarrassed by words in Psalm 69, a psalm quoted more than once in the New Testament as applying to the Christ: 'I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother's sons.'"<sup>62</sup>

**d) *Mary for Earth and Heaven*, 2002**

In this collection we have an exegesis of the Wedding Feast at Cana by John McHugh, who has served as a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Although many exegetes point to the Wedding Feast of Cana as an indication of the mediation of Mary the mother, McHugh sees it differently. Concerning the term "woman" that is used, he states:

Apart from the two occurrences at Cana and Calvary in John 2:3 and 19:26, there is no text in the Bible or in rabbinical writings where a son addresses his mother as 'Woman.' The choice of this unusual form of address thus confirms the view that in these two texts the evangelist wished to draw attention away from Mary's blood-relationship with Jesus, in order to intimate that she was to have, in the gospel story, a role very different from that of being Jesus' physical mother.<sup>63</sup>

McHugh looks at the canonical meaning of the wedding feast as a symbol of an announcement of the coming kingdom.

<sup>61</sup> William J. Bridcut, "Did Mary remain a virgin?" in *Mary Is for Everyone: Papers on Mary and Ecumenism ...*, ed. William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing, 1997), 16.

<sup>62</sup> Bridcut, "Did Mary remain a virgin?" 19.

<sup>63</sup> John McHugh, "The Wedding at Cana (John 2.1-11)," in *Mary for Earth and Heaven*, ed. William M. McLoughlin, O.S.M., and Jill Pinnock (Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing, 2002), 4.

With other aspects of the account also having symbolic meaning, he sees the whole of the story acting as a typology. Mary's role "is presented as the mother of Jesus, that is, as the one by whose motherhood he is entitled to call himself an Israelite, a Jew, and the one who had brought him up in the ways of the Law."<sup>64</sup> Obviously, here it is a specific exegetical approach that is critical to drawing McHugh's meaning from the account. The ecumenist should then ask, can this meaning be corroborated by patristic writings and tradition from the early church?

***e) Mary for Time and Eternity, 2007***

In this collection, we see the work of biblical exegesis at work in an analysis of the ARCIC document by Desmond Miller, a retired General Practitioner and Marian author, who holds a diploma in pastoral theology and also an M.A. in Marian Studies from the University of Wales. His is a Roman Catholic response to the Anglican-Roman Catholic report. He opens by stating: "This Agreed Statement . . . is based on 'a careful ecclesial and ecumenical reading of the Scriptures, in the light of the ancient common traditions' aimed at elucidating 'the place of Mary in the economy of hope and grace.'"<sup>65</sup> He reflects on how the study of scripture occurred in the ARCIC dialogue which brings us back to the same central question: "Can it be scripture alone, or is tradition to be considered also?" He wrote:

All doctrine must have a basis in Scripture as interpreted by the Church, whether it be explicit, as for the virginal conception of Jesus, or implicit, as in the case of the Immaculate Conception, where it only became clear after long reflection that a certain text supports a concept that has developed over time, e.g. Romans 8:28-30 . . . In this document we find that the Commission has made a deep study of the Marian texts and has come up with some interesting insights.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> McHugh, "The Wedding at Cana," 8.

<sup>65</sup> Desmond Miller, "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ, The ARCIC Statement," in *Mary for Time and Eternity: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism* (Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing, 2007), 15.

<sup>66</sup> Miller, "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ," 17.

Desmond then articulates a Roman Catholic Church response to the ARCIC biblical studies:

The Scriptures themselves arose out of an oral tradition. The Catholic Church teaches that 'tradition and Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church' (*DV* para 10). This corrects the notion of *scriptura sola* as formulated by the reformers of the sixteenth century.<sup>67</sup>

The question remains: does this convince Christian brothers and sisters in a move toward unity?

Also in this volume is an analysis of the work of the Dombes Group. Fr. Thomas A. Thompson, S.M., notes the Dombes' position on the spiritual reading of the Scripture:

Recognizing that churches are influenced by their own confessional documents in their approach to Scripture, Dombes proposes reading the Scripture in light of the early creeds, before the divisions occurred among the churches. The early creeds, it is noted, were the products of the Church's own 'spiritual reading of the Scripture,' which involved a dialogue between Scripture and the Church.<sup>68</sup>

Fr. Thompson comments that this "spiritual interpretation of Scripture" can easily correspond "to much of what the Catholic Church defines as Tradition."<sup>69</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION: Analysis of Ecumenical Success in Using Scripture

The evangelical Christian exegetes tend to utilize a more patristic approach to scripture—seeing it in its meaning in front of the text (synchronic) with some expression using the spiritual senses (diachronic). Roman Catholic magisterial documents encourage reference to the Bible in ecumenical dialogue and appear to use mostly the literal sense in

<sup>67</sup> Miller, "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ," 17.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Thompson, S.M., "A 'pioneer' document: 'The Virgin Mary in the plan of God and the Communion of Saints,'" in *Mary for Time and Eternity*, ed. McLoughlin and Pinnock, 330.

<sup>69</sup> Thompson, "A 'pioneer' document," 331.



documents. Only in the exegetical probe behind the text in the Annunciation passage and, in particular, the phrase *kecharitomenē*, is there more allegorical and spiritual-doctrinal sense employed. In seeing Virgin Mary as Mediatrix (mediator for the faithful), the biblical passage of the Wedding Feast of Cana is often cited. Here again, the exegesis must take on examination behind the text and comprehending the term "woman" and what may be happening, in fact, in between the verses. The exegesis of Reform churches is often quite the same as the Roman Catholic without the same theological and spiritual reading. The difficulty experienced, then, is when the exegetical approach takes on an informing view behind the text. For example, the Anglican-Roman Catholic report indicates an approaching convergence on understanding the favor of grace granted Mary at the Annunciation, although the report also makes it quite clear that Anglicans cannot accept the definition of the Immaculate Conception itself. Since the application of tradition in analysis behind the text is foreign to evangelicals and most Protestants, there is still more to be done in exchange on Marian scriptural passages.

#### —*Success Provided by Use of Scripture*

The numerous ecumenical dialogue events that have taken place over the past fifty years have made progress, although slow and painful. At first, discussion about the Virgin Mary was absent from dialogue and reports. It has been in the last two decades that the Lutheran and Catholic Dialogue, the Groupe des Dombes, ARCIC, and the evangelicals have turned to see what can be said about Mary, and now dialogue centers on biblical study. Success takes the form of an opening of hearts and minds to one another and to the actual biblical texts. Vatican II and the writing of subsequent popes have demonstrated a dedication to stating Marian doctrine as it is bathed in biblical texts. This, in turn, has paved a way for non-Catholic denominations to follow suit and talk about Mary in biblical terms with the Church they once all feared as confirmed in Mariolatry. The agreed hermeneutic that has emerged for all is reverence for the mother of Christ and acceptance of the fact that she is the model disciple of her Son, who trusted and obeyed God the Father with the Holy Spirit who overshadowed her and filled her with joy! *Rejoice Mary, the Lord is with thee!*