

# ‘TO SEE WITH THE EYES OF THE IMAGINATION . . .’: SCRIPTURE IN THE EXERCISES AND RECENT INTERPRETATION

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IT WAS COMMONPLACE in the 1960s to hear the most acclaimed retreat directors confess their loss of confidence in preaching retreats. Many gave up the practice altogether. The problem was scripture. More precisely, it was the new understanding of scripture sanctioned in the Catholic Church in the 1943 Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* and confirmed—after some setbacks—in the Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum* [1965]). The historical-critical method, which these documents endorsed,<sup>1</sup> recognized literary forms other than the strictly historical in the biblical texts, and also the contribution of the community and the individual writers to the shaping of the biblical record. With respect to the Gospels, in particular, one could never be certain again, so it seemed, whether Jesus really did or said any of the things reported of him. This doubt undercut the traditional method of presenting the Exercises, which, after the First Week, consist so largely of a series of contemplations of the life of Jesus in the Gospels.

If a good number of retreat directors lost confidence at this point, there were others who saw positive possibilities. An early and widely popular attempt to take advantage of the scriptural revival was David M. Stanley’s *A modern scriptural approach to the Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>2</sup> Many noted the fundamental harmony between the basic content and dynamic of the Exercises and the new understanding of scripture.<sup>3</sup> The sombre meditations of the First Week were filled out with the wealth of conversion material provided by the Old Testament and also by New Testament parables such as that of the Two Sons in Luke 15. The somewhat abstract theology of the opening First Principle

and Foundation was fleshed out in Creation psalms (e.g., Psalm 103 [104]) and New Testament christological hymns (e.g., Col 1,15-20).<sup>4</sup>

At the same time there occurred a notable shift away from preached retreats towards the individual-directed retreat as the fundamental Ignatian model. In accordance with the original instruction of the Exercises the mysteries of the life of Christ were no longer preached—at least that eased the difficulty to some extent—so much as proposed to individual retreatants for meditation. A prime requirement of the director was that she or he be armoured with a good knowledge of scripture so as to be able to find the text or reading most apt to aid the directee at this particular stage of his or her progress in the retreat. Many directors acquired a good overall grasp of modern scriptural scholarship, not merely to have a well-stocked armoury of texts but also to be in a position to resolve doubts and confusions in the scriptural area that might trouble retreatants from time to time.

Nonetheless some tension remained between the way scripture was being used in the Exercises and the approach that the historical-critical method appeared to dictate. The method seeks above all to view the text in its original historical context in order to come as close as possible to its primary original meaning. It presupposes that a text has one privileged meaning and that meaning is the literal sense as intended by the author. While not excluding other interpretations—the ‘fuller sense’, the typological, even the allegorical—it insists that the literal sense remains primary and the canon against which all further interpretations ought to be measured.

True, the movement inspired by historical criticism recognized that the scriptures were documents of faith and inspiration, written out of faith and for faith. As employed by its best interpreters, the method did not simply strive to re-create a knowledge of the past for its own sake. Sensitive to the distinctive theologies of the biblical writers, notably the evangelists, it sought to convey to the reader a taste of the variety of the theological fare contained in the bible. The plurality of theologies thus uncovered could serve both to promote and legitimate a healthy and liberating variety of pastoral and ascetical responses in current Christian life. Where, for example, the understanding of Jesus emerging from the old, pre-critical ‘amalgam’ of the gospel record had been dominated by the christology of John, through historical criticism many now felt the bracing, liberating winds of Mark—up till then rather much the ‘Cinderella’

evangelist as far as the traditional lectionary was concerned. Nonetheless, what the method chiefly sought was an enlightened *understanding* of the literal sense of the scriptures. This accurate, well-founded understanding would serve as reservoir for the nourishment and growth of a mature, reasonable faith.

*The Exercises and the imagination*

How different St Ignatius's instructions in the Exercises. The Second Annotation sets the tone from the start by placing maximal stress upon the contribution of the retreatant. The director is to 'faithfully narrate the history of the contemplation or meditation . . . , but to do so only briefly'. The excellent pedagogical reason for this is then proposed:

. . . when those who contemplate, take the true groundwork of the history, discussing and reasoning by themselves, and meeting with something that makes the history clearer and better felt (whether this happen through their own reasoning, or through the enlightenment of their understanding by Divine grace), they thereby enjoy greater spiritual relish and fruit than if the one who gives the Exercises had minutely explained and developed the meaning of the history; for it is not to know much, but it is to understand and savour the matter interiorly, that fills and satisfies the soul.<sup>5</sup>

The old preached retreats, with their vivid, detailed re-creation of the scriptural scene, certainly sinned much against this precept—often, doubtless, with fruit in other directions. But even in the directed retreat the principle set out here by Ignatius would suggest that 'too much' scriptural information brought to prayer, no matter how well-founded and inspiring, will hinder rather than further the end in view. That end is clearly set out by Ignatius: not a merely intellectual understanding but that 'interior savouring of the matter' which 'fills and satisfies the soul'.

What Ignatius is requiring of the retreatant throughout the Exercises is, above all, an exercise of the *imagination*.<sup>6</sup> This is clear in the detailed instructions given for the 'composition of place'—one is to 'see with the eyes of the imagination', either the corporeal place where the persons I wish to contemplate are to be found, or else an image suitable to the meditation I am making (Exx 47). In the Contemplations on the life of Christ in the Second, Third and Fourth weeks the encouragement given to the retreatant to exercise the visual imagination is truly remarkable: I am

to see with the eyes of the imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem; considering its length, breadth, and whether the way be level or through valleys and over hills; and likewise seeing the spot or cave of the Nativity, how large or small, how low or high and how it is prepared. (Exx 112)

Likewise, with the supper room, 'whether (it be) great or small, whether of this shape or some other' (Exx 192).

These invitations to exercise the imagination in the more 'architectural' sphere pale before the appeal to the imagination in the great decisive meditations of the Second Week (and the Final Contemplation to Obtain Love, of Week Four). But what is striking throughout is the liberty given to retreatants to allow their imagination full rein. There is no attempt whatsoever to control the retreatant's reflection through any biblical data not bearing immediately upon the purpose of the meditation.<sup>7</sup> Understanding and information have their place, especially in the preparation for the meditations and the all-important reflections upon them. But, clearly, Ignatius believed very strongly that in achieving the conversion and freedom which are the main aim of the Exercises, the imagination was where the contest was chiefly engaged. The more active and less passive the retreatant could be in this process, so much the better.

One does not, of course, make a retreat in order to gain an accurate and critical knowledge of scripture. Nonetheless, a scripture scholar who has witnessed the long battle in the Catholic Church to have the historical-critical method finally accepted and endorsed as the best path to the literal sense might well experience some qualms at the use to which scripture is put in the Exercises and in the Ignatian method of contemplation derived from them.<sup>8</sup> I well remember one very distinguished biblical scholar, a veteran of the long struggle over scripture that finally came to an end with *Dei Verbum* in 1965, remarking somewhat tersely under his breath at a conference on the Exercises, 'As long as they remember that it's the fruit of their own imagination and not the inspired meaning for all time'.

One can appreciate the scholar's qualms. But, on the other hand, the evident fruit derived down the centuries from precisely the imaginative use of scripture proposed by the Exercises raises questions of a hermeneutical order for the scripture expert. If scripture can be used effectively in this way to promote, under the grace of the Spirit, genuine conversion of heart and a closer patterning of human lives upon the gospel, is not this something which must be added to the hermeneutical equation itself? Does it not suggest that to confine

the legitimate, or even the normative, usage of scripture to the literal sense as determined by the historical-critical method is over restrictive—and in fact at odds with the centuries of Church practice before the rise of the critical period, beginning most notably with the rich use of scripture in the patristic era?

*New developments in scriptural interpretation*

In this connection it is significant that the last fifteen years have seen new developments in the scholarly interpretation of scripture. On the one hand, dissatisfaction with sole reliance upon the historical-critical method, especially in its effects upon the life of the Church, has become widespread and vocal. On the other hand, there has been the rise of alternative approaches, varying in many ways but united in their challenge to the dominance of the literal sense and its appeal to authorial intention as primary criterion. My main aim from here on is to review the extent to which this twin development bears upon the usage of scripture in the Exercises. But first, why is the historical-critical method under attack and what are the new directions in which scriptural interpretation has been moving?

*A. The historical-critical method under challenge*

Certain circles within Christianity have never accepted the historical method nor the results of its application. Opposition to it from fundamentalist Protestantism is nothing new and rightwing Catholic circles have of late increasingly joined the fray.<sup>9</sup> More significant, however, has been the dissatisfaction expressed from within theological and biblical circles where once the method had reigned supreme.<sup>10</sup> Complaints range from the more theoretical at one end to the pastoral and spiritual at the other. Perhaps the chief complaint is that while the method may serve well to reconstruct the original context of the text and even, with some reservations, tell us what it *meant*, that does not get us all that far in determining what it now *means*. In other words, the method takes us back to the past and leaves us there; it does not bridge the vast historical and cultural gap between past and present.

With respect to this study of the past, the critics assert, the method contains an implicit claim to an objectivity, which is never and can never be fully realized; all interpreters, even the most self-aware, bring to the task the presuppositions and prejudices of their milieu, including that of their own professional guild. The results of the enquiry are seldom agreed upon by all and never appear fixed

beyond possibility of dispute. Faith cannot rest upon the fragile consensus established from time to time by historical critics.

More seriously still from a theological point of view, the objectifying tendency of the method brings the biblical data under the judgement of the exegete, who tends to assess it according to the values of his or her own time and taste. While this may be appropriate for a secular historical text, it is inimical to Christianity's sense of the bible as the Word of God: the Word judges *us*, not we the Word.

Lastly, in this more theoretical area, the method has never quite shaken off the rationalist character that attended its origins in the Enlightenment and clung to it throughout the 'History of Religions' epoch of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century biblical scholarship; as such it is not a sympathetic instrument for appreciating the emotive, imaginative, ritual elements of biblical revelation. It is hesitant and sceptical in the area of the transcendent; it prefers to catalogue, classify and describe such experience, rather than submit in awe and veneration. It is thus held to be incommensurate with the biblical texts which it purports to interpret.

On the more practical level, priests and ministers trained as students in the method claim that, while it may have turned them into (less competent) apprentices of their biblical professors, it has been of limited usefulness in the day to day work of preaching and pastoral care. More seriously, it tends to take the key to scripture away from the Church at large and leave it with the guild of experts, the scripture scholars, whose word thus becomes final on any interpretation. This hardly corresponds to the understanding of scripture's role in the Church which prevailed in patristic times and is now being regained in the wake of Vatican II.<sup>11</sup> Above all, it disenfranchises the poor, the unlettered, the 'little ones', to whom, according to the gospel, have been revealed the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 11, 25; Luke 10, 21). In similar vein, the Third World churches issue the complaint that the method comes to them freighted with Western European cultural and ideological bias, a further instance of religious imperialism insensitive to alternative religious modes and socio-economic situations.<sup>12</sup>

None of this signals the widespread abandonment of the historical-critical method in either scholarly or wider church circles.<sup>13</sup> All but the most extreme of critics accept that it has a role to play. What is widely challenged is the dominance and priority that it has clearly enjoyed, at least in scholarly circles in recent times.<sup>14</sup> It is now time to

survey the alternatives that have been proposed—to some extent in tandem with a critique of the historical-critical method.

*B. Alternatives to the historical-critical approach*

For two hundred years, following a development that began in the late Middle Ages, was nurtured in the Renaissance and came to full flower in the Enlightenment, history reigned supreme as the dominant paradigm for investigating and interpreting the biblical text. The growing pursuit of historical-critical methodology throughout this period, especially its characteristic zeal to pursue sources and the early traditions that bring one as close as possible to the actual events, reflected this preoccupation with history. In the present century, however, the broader Western cultural and philosophical scene has witnessed a gradual shift away from history as prime interpreter of reality in the direction of language. Since the early seventies this tendency has had its impact upon the field of biblical criticism. So profound, in fact, has been the swing away from history in the direction of language and literature that many scholars, using a standard sociological category, speak of a 'paradigm shift' in biblical studies—the most important transformation in Christian interpretation of the bible since the advent of the historical paradigm itself.<sup>15</sup>

*i. Philosophy*

Several converging factors have influenced this shift. On the one hand, in the area of hermeneutics (interpretation theory) contemporary European philosophy, represented notably by H.-G. Gadamer in the Heideggerian tradition and P. Ricoeur in the phenomenological, has moved the focus away from preoccupation with the author of a text to concentrate upon the interaction of text and reader (or hearer). This has stressed the autonomy of the text as regards meaning and tended to undercut the sense that a single meaning, controlled by the intention of the author, can be derived from any particular text. Texts are open to a plurality of meanings and the reader enters essentially into the construction of meaning.<sup>16</sup> In such an understanding the old distinction between what a text 'meant' (that is, in its original historical context) and what it (now) 'means' (with the former largely controlling the latter) tends to break down.

*ii. Secular literary theory*

Along with this philosophical tendency—to some extent inspired by it, to some extent influenced also by other intellectual tendencies

such as structuralism—has been the influence of modern secular literary criticism. This has impinged upon biblical interpretation in a variety of forms, most of them overlapping in a way that defies neat categorization. There are, however, certain general characteristics of the modern literary approach which mark it off clearly from the historical-critical.<sup>17</sup>

In the first place, where historical criticism seeks above all to establish the history of the present text, attending to the breaks and inconsistencies that point to the existence of pre-existing sources and so attempting to reconstruct the history of the tradition behind the text (the diachronic approach), literary criticism tends to take the text in its final form, without regard to its pre-history or sources; it then works with it as a literary unity, as a continuous whole, seeing especially the place of the various elements in relationship to the whole (synchronic approach).

Thus the literary approach is ahistorical in tendency. Scholars employ an illustration that has become classic in recent years to show the difference between the two approaches—the historical and the literary. Historical criticism tends to regard the text as a ‘window’ *through* which one may look to see something else: the historical world or tradition behind the text. Thus one looks into Mark’s Gospel to see—in the first instance—the world of the community out of which and for which Mark wrote; subsequently, through a careful analysis of traditions, one might hope to see further: to the world and life of Jesus himself. In the literary-critical approach, however, the text functions, not as a window into history but rather as a ‘mirror’ reflecting its own narrative world, a world ‘into’ which it invites the reader. By means of a close reading, literary criticism studies the ways in which the text functions to actualize this invitation and so work a transformative effect upon the reader.<sup>18</sup> Thus a literary-critical approach to Mark’s Gospel will seek to uncover the narrative world created by Mark’s theological interpretation of reality and pinpoint the various strategies whereby the reader is drawn to appropriate that world and its values. The cost of that appropriation will often be the shattering of the world-view to which he or she currently and comfortably adheres.<sup>19</sup>

Along with this interest in texts as agents of transformation, the literary-critical approach has been particularly sensitive to the imaginative aspect of scripture: the world of imagery, symbol, poetry and myth, which permeates the bible. Crucial in this regard has been the application to scripture of new understandings of metaphor as a

pervasive and inherently subversive mode of discourse. Metaphor sets two apparently incompatible things together. The resolution of the resultant tension opens up fresh levels of meaning, paving the way for new vision and new hope and openness to transcendence.<sup>20</sup>

As is understandable, nowhere have such literary insights been applied more fruitfully than in the area of the parables of Jesus. Earlier scholarship (following A. Julicher) had been principally concerned to rescue parables from treatment as allegories, drawing attention to the single point made by a parable in contrast to the multiple allusions of allegory. Recent parable interpretation has taken many paths.<sup>21</sup> Most striking, perhaps, has been the tendency to see parables as extended metaphors. They use concrete images familiar from everyday life but by suddenly evoking a conjunction of the seemingly incompatible—e.g., ‘good’ and ‘Samaritan’, ‘laboured less’ and ‘paid the same’—they shatter illusion and penetrate the defences hedging conventional belief. In this way they open up the hearer to a fresh experience of God. By the same token, the parable itself is open to a variety of interpretation, since different hearers/readers will respond in different ways. So in this area too we note, again, the stress of the literary approach that the involvement of the audience forbids the restriction of interpretation to one single meaning.

The emphasis upon the reader in the creation of meaning has emerged particularly in two currently very popular approaches, both illustrative of the influence of secular literary theory on biblical interpretation: rhetorical criticism and narrative criticism. Rhetorical criticism is basically concerned to see the text as instrument of persuasion: to note the various strategies and devices whereby the author seeks to enlist the attention, emotions and interest of readers. Its emphasis upon the affective and the ethical forms a valuable counterpoise to an excessively intellectual approach to the bible as a repository of theology. By opening up the rhetorical purpose that is characteristic of almost all biblical texts it can fire the reader’s imagination and so elicit response.<sup>22</sup> Narrative criticism has its justification in the large amount of biblical revelation that is couched in story form. Particularly sensitive to narrative features of texts, especially in regard to plot, character, and ‘point of view’, it is interested in the way a story is told in the text so as to engage the reader in the ‘world of the text’ and its system of values.<sup>23</sup> Once again, here we have an approach that attends to the role of the reader in constructing the meaning of the text and even to some extent

privileges the reader and the reader's context over that of the original author.<sup>24</sup>

All these approaches expand the possibility of interpretation in the sense that they include the reader and the reader's context in the process of interpretation. More radical still are non-contextual approaches such as that of structuralism (which sees the text simply as a closed system of signs having meaning only in relation to themselves)<sup>25</sup> and deconstruction, which overthrows both structuralism and the various literary approaches stemming from the New Criticism by questioning any determinate reference of a text ('signifier') to a further reality ('signified'). The way is thus opened up to a radical indeterminacy as regards meaning.<sup>26</sup>

Biblical scholars on the whole do not tend to follow the plurality of meanings this far. Nonetheless, as the above survey should serve to show, the emphasis upon the reader and the imagination has opened up the possibility of several, if not multiple interpretations.

### *iii. Liberation*

Aside from the influence of literary criticism, other assaults upon the hope of deriving a single, historically-determined meaning from biblical texts have come from the liberationist perspective. The basic presupposition here, whether in the form of feminist exegesis or the understanding of the bible stemming from the liberation theology movement of Latin America and elsewhere, is that there is no politically neutral or detached exegesis. All interpretation is either for or against the oppressed, whoever these may be—women, the poor, black people. Biblical exegesis, to be faithful to the liberating gospel, must adopt, explicitly and unashamedly, an advocacy stance on behalf of the oppressed.

Within this broad perspective, feminist exegesis undertakes a hermeneutics of suspicion to disclose the prevailing androcentric bias of most biblical literature at its obvious or surface level. By attending particularly to subtle hints and indications often overlooked in the prevailing androcentric bias of the tradition, it aims to reclaim the biblical record as women's history and to interpret it in the light of women's struggle for liberation now.<sup>27</sup> Particularly significant here is the understanding of the biblical text not as archetype (that is as something which sets a fixed pattern for all time) but as prototype (a model which is open to possibility of transformation).<sup>28</sup> Liberation theology privileges a reading of the bible from the perspective of the poor and oppressed and insists that all valid reading must be

informed by praxis, that is, by a practical stance with and among the poor. In this it is particularly attentive to the socio-political context, both the original context of the text (e.g., the Exodus story in the light of the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt) and the present aspirations of the poor for political and economic liberation. Again, in this overall approach we find an insistence that the situation of the audience—present-day readers and their context (socio-economic as well as religious)—enters essentially into the derivation of meaning in the bible and so opens the way for a variety of interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

*Reflections: the new developments and the Exercises*

Surveying this whole range of approaches in which space is made for a variety of interpretation in biblical texts, the question inevitably presents itself: are all interpretations equally valid—the way of radical indeterminacy? If a negative answer must be given to this—as most, save the radical deconstructionists, would agree—further questions then follow: how does one assign limits to the range of acceptable variations and are some interpretations more normative than others? Finally, what role might the historical-critical approach retain—if not to control at least to act as a kind of anchor against the wild winds of total indeterminacy? These are questions which deeply exercise biblicists and theologians at present. I offer the following reflections on this matter, conscious that the debate remains very open.

In the first place the simple equivalence of meaning with the literal sense or sense intended by the author can no longer be sustained in its absolute form. The Church has, of course, always recognized a variety or plurality of possible meanings in scripture<sup>30</sup>—even if the recent tendency has been to curb wilder flights of allegorical fancy in favour of the literal sense. All interpreters have to reckon with the difficulties inherent in the idea of authorial intention and an understanding of the literal sense that ties it too closely to a meaning intended by an author. Moreover, in the case of biblical documents it is often very hard to speak of a single author and only in a few cases can a single author (e.g., Paul) actually be named. Nonetheless, the notion of a human author has played an important role in the traditional theory of inspiration;<sup>31</sup> it is hard to see a total shift away from the author in any officially sanctioned theology of scriptural interpretation. There are also philosophical considerations urging caution.<sup>32</sup>

Granted, however, that some respect must be accorded to a literal (intended) sense but that meaning cannot be restricted to this sense,

the question then becomes: Amongst a plurality of meanings, what degree of primacy or privilege should the literal sense retain? Or, to what extent should it function as a touchstone, a criterion of the validity of other meanings? Scholars would, again, divide on this matter. I suspect that few, save the most radical indeterminists, would argue the validity of an interpretation that was clear contrary to the evident literal sense—e.g., to interpret the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18, 9–14) in a way that favours the self-regarding perfectionist over the sincere outsider. I would myself argue that the literal sense sets a direction—suitably broad and not narrowly confined—in which other interpretations may proceed, even if they could go considerably beyond what could have been the original intention.<sup>33</sup> In this way the literal sense is not like a stone, cast into a pond, which causes ripples in all directions; it is more like a torch-beam which from a single point produces an ever widening but nonetheless directed beam of light. Thus, to take an example from Paul, I would argue that while ecological concerns were far from the mind of Paul when he composed the celebrated passage about the groaning of creation in Romans 8, 18–22, it is totally appropriate to interpret the passage in a sense of human concern for the earth today.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, it is important to know that few biblical critics who endorse the new literary approach wish to abandon the contribution of historical-critical enquiry. Most remain convinced of the necessity to see texts in their original as well as their modern context.<sup>35</sup> So, for example, the discourse in John 5 following the healing of the paralytic at the pool is virtually unintelligible unless one understands Jesus's appeal to the necessity to keep on 'working' even on the sabbath in the light of the Jewish discussion about how creation could be sustained if God 'rested', as Genesis 1 said God did, on the seventh day. Likewise, one's understanding of John 9 is greatly impoverished unless one is aware of the illumination of the Temple in Jerusalem during the annual feast of Tabernacles. One could go on endlessly in this vein. *Some* knowledge of the original context is necessary for interpretation. In certain cases it is vital if totally unacceptable interpretations are to be excluded—e.g., an anti-Semitic reading due to ignorance of the technical sense in which the phrase 'the Jews' is used in John.

The historical-critical method above all unveils the 'otherness' of the biblical record, the 'distance' of the world it presupposes. This 'otherness' is not simply a bitter pill to be swallowed or an obstacle to

be overcome. It remains part of the 'offence' of the Incarnation—that God chose a particular time, a particular place and a particular person in which to take flesh in a unique and normative revelation. The particularity and 'otherness' of biblical revelation remains a vital check against deriving interpretations that are simply the reading-in of our own world-view and values, to have them canonized with biblical authority and guarantee.

I have spoken of a valid interpretation as one that goes in the same direction as what might be conceived to be that originally intended. Beyond this, one could propose a criterion of general coherence with a sense of scripture as a whole and with the larger document (e.g., a gospel) in question.<sup>36</sup> More fundamental still is coherence with the broader understanding of the faith. The Christian always reads and interprets scripture *within the community*; he or she comes to scripture from the community and brings any interpretation back to be tested against the community's faith and the tradition of the Church.<sup>37</sup> With interpretations, as with all other things, it is by their fruits that their validity will be known—and the presence or absence of the Spirit indicated.

Returning now to the Exercises, I would argue that recent developments in hermeneutics do make more room for the use of scripture they propose. Particularly significant—and perhaps comforting for directors and retreatants alike—is the recognition of the reader's contribution to any valid interpretation and the need to approach the scriptures as primarily documents of imagination, symbol and religious persuasion. The Exercises are using scripture in the way that scripture itself teaches it ought to be used (2 Tim 3, 16–17). Moreover, the retreatant makes use of scripture in a personal and restricted way, wholly different from the procedure of the preacher or theologian. What the retreatant discovers in imaginative contemplation is primarily a message for his or her own personal conversion. It is not something for public proclamation. And, even in the personal sphere, the structure of the Exercises presupposes that personal insight will be brought to the director, who can test its genuineness and conformity with an informed grasp of the scriptures and the wider faith of the Church. It is, once again, upon the director rather than the retreatant that responsibility in the scriptural area falls.

What the new approach does suggest is that considerations of historicity should not bulk too large. It is perfectly reasonable, within the scope of what the Exercises are about, for the retreatant to go

through them with a certain 'naivety' as regards history. One can give oneself fruitfully to the magnificent tableau of the meditation on the Incarnation as sketched by St Ignatius without wondering about whether an angel really did appear to Mary. Retreatants who bring an awareness of modern critical scholarship may have difficulties in this area. The director will have to be ready to address these from an informed knowledge of modern scriptural tendencies. But the director should also be able to reassure such retreatants that giving oneself in prayer to the mystery does not compromise intellectual integrity any more than does the surrender involved in giving oneself to great works of literature or art. Use of religious art in the form of paintings, icons, and so forth may in fact be of great assistance in moving out of the intellect and its restiveness to the level of imagination and feeling where the chief work is to be done.

What is perhaps remarkable is that the Exercises *are* so profoundly scriptural both in content and overall dynamic, stemming as they do from a period of Church history when the knowledge and use of scripture is generally considered to have been at low ebb. If the Exercises are inconceivable without the scriptures, they also constitute a most fruitful means of personally and vitally appropriating the scriptural message, of surrendering to the claim of the Word of God. Oft-quoted in this context are the words of the early interpreter of Ignatius, Jerome Nadal: 'The Exercises are effective in that they teach a way of preparing oneself to receive the Word of God and the Gospel'.<sup>38</sup> Recent developments in scriptural interpretation, both the historical-critical method and those approaches which seek to go beyond it, in all their rich variety can only serve to underline and support this claim.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See esp. Exx 12, 19; also the 1964 Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, 'On the historical truth of the Gospels' (Latin text and English translation given in *Catholic biblical quarterly* 26 (1964), pp 299-312.

<sup>2</sup> St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986 (orig. 1967); also C. M. Martini, *The Ignatian Exercises in the light of St John* (Gujurat: Anand, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> For several excellent discussions see the collection, *The Word of God in the Spiritual Exercises* (Rome: CIS, 1979)—esp. the contributions of W. J. Dalton and D. Mollat; also, D. M. Stanley, 'Contemplation of the Gospels: Ignatius Loyola, and the contemporary Christian', *Theological studies* 29 (1968), pp 417-43; F. R. de Gasperis, *The Spiritual Exercises as profound entry into the journey of biblical faith* (Rome: CIS, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Outstanding for its sensitive use of scripture in the Exercises is J. Laplace, *An experience of life in the Spirit* (London: Shand, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> *Spiritual Exercises* Exx 2 (translated by John Morris; [London: Burns & Oates, 1952<sup>5</sup>], language rendered inclusive by pluralization).

<sup>6</sup> While respecting the author's learning in the area, I am not persuaded by G. Cusson's stress upon the primacy of intellect and will in the *Spiritual Exercises: Biblical theology and the Spiritual Exercises* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1988), pp 99-107.

<sup>7</sup> Ignatius's reliance on Ludolph of Saxony allowed some quaint non-biblical details to creep in: the servant girl and the ox in the first prelude of the Contemplation on the Nativity (Exx 116).

<sup>8</sup> On the problem of the Exercises and scripture (especially in the light of the acceptance of the historical-critical method) see esp. J. A. Fitzmyer, 'The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius and recent gospel study', *Woodstock letters* 91 (1962), pp 246-73, esp. pp 273-74 [reprinted in *Program to adapt the Spiritual Exercises* ed T. A. Burke; Jersey City; n.d.]; D. M. Stanley, 'Contemplation of the Gospels: Ignatius Loyola, and the contemporary Christian', *Theological studies* 29 (1968), pp 417-43; Cusson, *Biblical theology and the Spiritual Exercises*, pp 220-234; D. Mollat, 'The use of scripture in the Exercises according to modern exegesis', in *The word of God in the Spiritual Exercises* (see n.2 above), pp 25-34.

<sup>9</sup> On this see the reflections of R. E. Brown, *The critical meaning of the bible* (New York: Paulist, 1981), pp 23-63; *idem*, 'Historical-critical exegesis and attempts at revisionism', *The bible today* 23 (1985), pp 157-65.

<sup>10</sup> Cf W. Wink, *The bible and human transformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), pp 1-15; P. Stuhimacher, *Historical criticism and the theological interpretation of scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp 61-75; B. S. Childs, *The New Testament as canon: an introduction* (London: SCM, 1984), pp 35-37.

<sup>11</sup> Cf *Dei Verbum* §§22, 25.

<sup>12</sup> So G. Soares-Prabhu, cited D. J. Harrington, 'Biblical hermeneutics in recent discussion: New Testament', in *A guide to contemporary hermeneutics*, ed by D. K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp 13-20, see p 16.

<sup>13</sup> See esp. Brown, *The critical meaning of the bible*, pp 23-29; *Biblical exegesis and church doctrine* (New York: Paulist, 1985), pp 10-25; 'The contribution of historical biblical criticism to ecumenical church discussion' in R. J. Nuehaus, (ed), *Biblical interpretation in crisis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp 24-49; J. A. Fitzmyer, 'Historical criticism: its role in biblical interpretation and church life', *Theological studies* 50 (1989), pp 244-59.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that the ablest historical critics, especially in Catholic tradition, have always recognized and defended the legitimacy of more than literal senses; cf esp. Brown, *Critical meaning of the bible*, pp 29-44.

<sup>15</sup> The notion of 'paradigm shift' stems ultimately from T. Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1962); see D. Robertson, Art. 'Literature, Bible as', *Interpreter's dictionary of the bible, Supplementary Volume* ([henceforth *IDBSuppl*] Nashville; Abingdon, 1976), pp 547-51.

<sup>16</sup> On this see S. M. Schneiders, 'From exegesis to hermeneutic: the problem of the contemporary meaning of scripture', *Horizons* 8 (1981), pp 23-39.

<sup>17</sup> In the past 'literary criticism' has been used as a broad designation of all procedures associated with 'higher criticism' of the bible, though it applied most precisely to the tracing of sources. Nowadays the term is normally used to refer to the recent application to the bible of approaches derived from modern secular literary criticism.

<sup>18</sup> The image goes back to Murray Krieger, *A window to criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1964), pp 3-70; see also N. R. Petersen, *Literary criticism for New Testament critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), pp 24-48; S. M. Schneiders, *New Jerome biblical commentary* (ed by J. A. Fitzmyer et al.; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990 [henceforth *NJBC*]), p 1159 (71:59).

<sup>19</sup> Cf C. Myers, *Binding the strong man: a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus* (New York: Orbis, 1988): 'The primary goal of Mark was to mediate the "past" into his "present" . . . by encouraging his audience to identify with the disciples in the story. But this strategy also extends to all "future" readers, including ourselves: we too are called to judge our own historical existence by the story of Jesus as told by Mark in terms of his historical situation. Both Jesus and Mark are "past" to us, but the very nature of the Gospel's historical "elasticity" removes that distance once we enter into the story as reader' (p 108).

<sup>20</sup> Here I am indebted particularly to M. Coleridge, 'The necessary angel: imagination and the bible', *Pacifica* 1 (1988), pp 171-88, esp. pp 181-83 (relying especially on Ricoeur). For calling attention to the imaginative aspect of the bible, English-speaking New Testament scholarship acknowledges a particular debt to the American biblical scholar and poet, Amos Wilder: *Early Christian rhetoric: the language of the gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1971 [orig. 1964]); *Jesus' parables and the war of myths: essays on the imagination in the scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> On recent parable interpretation see the fine summary in N. Perrin, *Jesus and the language of the kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), pp 89-193; J. D. Crossan, *In parables: the challenge of the historical Jesus*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); J. R. Donahue, *The gospel in parable* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), pp 1-27; *idem*, *NJBC*, 1364-69 (81:57-88).

<sup>22</sup> See G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament interpretation through rhetorical criticism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina, 1984); W. Wuellner, 'Where is rhetorical criticism taking us?', *Catholic biblical quarterly*, 49 (1987), pp 448-63; J. I. H. McDonald, 'Rhetorical criticism' in R. J. Coggins & J. L. Houlden, *A dictionary of biblical interpretation* (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Trinity, 1990 [henceforth *DBI*]), pp 599-600.

<sup>23</sup> Narrative criticism has borrowed from secular literary theory key distinctions: the implied author generated by the text itself as distinct from the real author; the implied reader generated by the text as distinct from the real reader and also the intended reader. On Narrative Criticism, see P. Perkins, 'Crisis in Jerusalem? Narrative criticism in New Testament studies', *Theological studies* 50 (1989), pp 296-313; S. D. Moore, *Literary criticism and the gospels: the theoretical challenge* (New Haven & London: Yale University, 1989), pp 3-107; R. C. Tannehill, 'Narrative criticism' in *DBI*, pp 488-89; F. J. Moloney, 'Narrative criticism of the gospels', *Pacifica* 4 (1991), pp 181-210.

<sup>24</sup> Cf Perkins, 'Crisis in Jerusalem?', p 299, n.10.

<sup>25</sup> On structuralism in biblical interpretation, see D. Robertson, *IDBSupp*, pp 549-50; R. F. Collins, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1983), pp 231-71; M. W. G. Stibbe, 'Structuralism' in *DBI*, pp 650-55; M. Davies 'Literary criticism' in *ibid.*, pp 403-04; E. V. McKnight, *The bible and the reader* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), pp 15-48.

<sup>26</sup> On deconstruction in biblical interpretation, see Moore, *Literary criticism of the gospels*, pp 131-37; Schneiders, *NJBC*, p 1159 (71:62); M. LaFargue, 'Are texts determinate? Derrida, Barth, and the role of the biblical scholar', *Harvard theological review* 81 (1988), pp 341-57; further references in Moloney, 'Narrative criticism', pp 197-98, n. 57.

<sup>27</sup> See E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In memory of her* (London: SCM, 1983), p 29; E. Wainwright, 'In search of the lost coin: towards a feminist biblical hermeneutic', *Pacifica* 2 (1989), pp 135-50.

<sup>28</sup> See Fiorenza, *In memory of her*, p 33.

<sup>29</sup> See J. L. Segundo, *Liberation of theology* (New York: Orbis, 1975), pp 7-9; C. Mesters, 'The use of the bible in Christian communities of the common people', in A. T. Hennelly, (ed) *Liberation theology: a documentary history* (New York: Orbis, 1990), pp 14-28.

<sup>30</sup> For a survey see R. E. Brown, *NJBC*, pp 1153-58 (71:30-52).

<sup>31</sup> See Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* §11; cf J. J. Scullion, *The theology of inspiration* (Theology Today 10: Cork: Mercier, 1979); R. F. Collins, *NJBC*, 1023-33 ('Inspiration': 65:1-65).

<sup>32</sup> For a defence of the role of the author see E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967); *idem*, *The aims of interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976); in the same direction but critical of Hirsch see, B. Meyer, *Critical realism and the New Testament* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1989), esp. Chap. II, 'The primacy of the intended sense of texts' (pp 17-55).

<sup>33</sup> N. M. Watson, 'Authorial intention—suspect concept for biblical scholars?', *Australian biblical review* 35 (1987), pp 6-13.

<sup>34</sup> See B. Byrne, *Inheriting the earth: The Pauline basis of a spirituality for our time* (Homebush [NSW]: St Paul, 1990), pp 80-94.

<sup>35</sup> For a compelling defence of the significance of context from a literary critic see G. Steiner, *Real presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), pp 66-69.

<sup>36</sup> Cf *Dei Verbum* §12: '... But, since holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content

and unity of the whole of Scripture, if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly brought to light' (W. M. Abbott, ed, *The documents of Vatican II* [London: Chapman, 1967], p 120). Here the notion of a 'fuller sense' (*sensus plenior*) in scripture is relevant. On this idea in Catholic exegesis, now largely subsumed into the 'more than literal' approaches recently developed, see esp. R. E. Brown, *NJBC*, p 1157 (71:49-51).

<sup>37</sup> This sense of interpretation within the community has some affinity with a further movement in modern biblical criticism, that of 'canonical criticism', as proposed especially by B. S. Childs, (*Introduction to the Old Testament as scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979]; *The New Testament as canon; an introduction* [London: SCM, 1985]) and J. A. Sanders, (*Canon and community* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984]), which, by placing primary stress upon the final form of individual books and their place within the total collection (canon), makes the faith community the final arbiter of meaning. The approach has not, however, met with wide acceptance; see S. M. Schneiders, *NJBC*, pp 1160-61 (71:71-74). Something parallel can perhaps also be seen in the approach of the radical 'Reader response' critic, Stanley Fish, on the role of the 'interpretive community'; see Moore, *Literary criticism of the gospels*, pp 116-18.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted (in Latin; translation mine) in D. Mollat, 'The use of scripture in the Exercises according to modern exegesis' in *The Word of God* (see n. 3 above), pp 25-34, see p 33; cf also P. G. McCormick, 'A *directory* for the use of scripture in an Ignatian retreat', *Review for religious* 38 (1979), pp 223-38, see p 223.