

The Exegetical Principles of Joseph Ratzinger

By
Brandon Otto

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Paper Outline

Joseph Ratzinger on Scriptural Exegesis

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Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, has been an enormously influential theologian, before, during, and even after his pontificate. His influence is such that “Ratzingerian” (relating to or similar to Ratzinger) is now a term in fairly common Catholic parlance, at least in more informal writing. Among his voluminous writings, he has covered many topics, but one of the most important, both in terms of his influence and in terms of the topic’s fundamental nature for theology, is the interpretation of Scripture. This paper will seek to outline Ratzinger’s views on the interpretation of Scripture, without distinguishing between his academic writings and his more official or magisterial writings, unlike certain commentators.¹ First, I will examine Ratzinger’s ideas regarding the historical-critical method, both in terms of its benefits and its critiques. Second, I will review Ratzinger’s brief thoughts on the spiritual senses of Scripture. Third, I will explore how Ratzinger views the role of Tradition in the interpretation of Scripture. Finally, to show Ratzinger’s exegesis in action, I will analyze two examples of his exegetical work: *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* and *Daughter Zion*. In this way, this paper aims to give a summary of Ratzinger’s notions of exegesis in order to give a model for other theologians and exegetes.

The historical-critical method of Scripture, which arose in the nineteenth century and has come to dominate modern exegesis, is one Ratzinger has had vital contact with since his early theological training at Tübingen.² Despite his very clear encouragement of the use of this method, he also sees many issues with both the method and the way it is used; this means that correction and complementing of the method are necessary. Each of these three areas will be

¹ Cf. Aaron Pidel, “Joseph Ratzinger on Biblical Inerrancy,” *Nova Et Vetera (English Edition)* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2014), *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 10, 2014), 308, n. 5.

² Cf. Scott W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 19.

covered briefly: the benefits of the historical-critical method, the limitations of the method itself, and the issues with the use of the method by many exegetes.

In his great papal work *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger added a forward that dealt heavily with the role of the historical-critical method in exegesis. Here he says very plainly and firmly that this method “is and remains an indispensable dimension of exegetical work.”³ The reason for this is because Christianity is historical and, consequently, factual. The historical-critical method helps us to understand the events and words of Scripture historically. Theology should use all things that help us to better understand the truth, especially the truth of the Gospel, and since history is such an essential dimension of Christianity, “faith itself demands” that theologians use the historical-critical method.⁴ The emphasis on the historicity of Christianity can be seen in how Ratzinger speaks of the “Christ-event” and how Jesus Christ is “history’s central event.”⁵ This accords with how he views action and event as more important than speech in understanding revelation, a point that lies behind one of his critiques of exegetes using the historical-critical method.⁶ The summary is that the historical-critical method encourages the exegete to use the historical context in interpreting a text, and this is indeed a necessary aspect of the text; as Ratzinger himself puts it, this method allows “the polyphony of history to be heard

³ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), xv; cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2011),

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html (accessed September 24, 2014), §32.

⁴ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, xv; cf. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Preface,” in Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, March 18, 1994, EWTN, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/PBCINTER.HTM> (accessed September 10, 2014)

⁵ L. Benedict Boeve and Gerard Mannion, *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed September 10, 2014), 16-18; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The 1988 Erasmus Lecture,” *First Things*, April 26, 2008, <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2008/04/biblical-interpretation-in-crisis> (accessed September 10, 2014).

⁶ Cf. Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed September 10, 2014), 50.

again, rising from behind the monotone of traditional interpretations.”⁷ If Ratzinger mentions the benefits and even the indispensability of this method, he writes much more about the limitations of the method.

The basic criticism would be that exegesis today is too focused on the historical-critical method: exegetes need to create a better balance of theological and historical exegesis.⁸ The reason why such a focus on the historical-critical method is dangerous is because of the inherent limitations in this method. In a lapidary axiom, Ratzinger remarks, “The historical-critical method is essentially a tool, and its usefulness depends on the way in which it is used.”⁹ First of all, a tool is not to be used on its own. There is a famous quip, often attributed to Abraham Maslow, which states, “To one who only has a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” If one focuses solely on the tool one has (in this case, the historical-critical method), he does not realize that other tools can be better suited to certain tasks; even more, other tools are *necessary* for some tasks. Ratzinger does not think the historical-critical method in itself is prone to the idea that it is a be-all, end-all tool: instead, the inner nature of the method itself opens it to the use of other exegetical methods.¹⁰ As will be explored later, for Ratzinger, the key complementary tool for the historical-critical method is the hermeneutic of faith: when both of these are combined, they form “a methodological whole.”¹¹ To summarize this view of the limited nature of the

⁷ Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis.”

⁸ Cf. Mark Kenney, “Verbum Domini and the Interpretation of Scripture,” *Compass* (10369686) 46, no. 1 (March 2012): 3-8, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 10, 2014).

⁹ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 43.

¹⁰ Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xviii.

¹¹ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance Into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), xv.

historical-critical method, Ratzinger states in an interview that this method is one which is “valuable in itself but that becomes sterile when made absolute.”¹²

Next, let us see the limitations of this tool itself which Ratzinger points out. The two key limitations are that “it has to leave biblical word in the past” and that “its specific object is the human word as human.”¹³ These criticisms are constant in Ratzinger’s discussion of the historical-critical method. It is, of course, very good at showing exegetes the historical context of a text, what that text meant in its original context, which is necessary. Yet, left to itself, this makes the Scriptural text merely an artefact of the past, a word which “is no longer taken in its actuality.”¹⁴ One particular topic related to this criticism is the constant historical-critical search for the “original” form of the text, the “pure” text, which will resurface in the discussion of Ratzinger’s critique of the critics. A glaring example of this search is the Jesus Seminar’s quest for the *ipsissima vox*, the original sayings of Christ, or “the historical Jesus,” as they might call Him. Regarding the more general “quest for the historical Jesus,” Ratzinger dismisses it as “[lacking] sufficient content to exert any significant historical impact,” especially because its focus on the past makes it impossible for it to lead to “a personal relationship with Jesus.”¹⁵ The search to determine the historical context of a text and to use that as a criterion to assist in interpreting the text, though, is one welcomed by Ratzinger. Yet much of the work of historical-critical exegetes merely results in hypotheses about “presumed sources” and “the supposed experience of supposed communities” that generated the text; if taken to too far an extreme, this

¹² Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 75.

¹³ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xvi-xvii.

¹⁴ Ratzinger, “Preface”; cf. the quote in Hahn, 35: “Therefore it can never show Christ yesterday, today, and forever, but only (if it remains true to itself) Christ as he was yesterday.”

¹⁵ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, xvi.

becomes “a dismemberment of the Bible” which includes a “new allegorism.”¹⁶ The allegorism he refers to is the plethora of interpretations some exegetes come to based solely off of these hypothetical sources and communities. (These hypotheses are not all complementary, either: they often become a “jungle of contradictions.”¹⁷) The conjectured difficulties of a community (whether confirmedly factual or merely hypothetical) becomes the sole filter through which a text is read. What this type of interpretation really is, according to Ratzinger, is “a means of self-affirmation for the interpreter”; in another location, he describes these interpretations of Christ’s person as “photographs of their authors and the ideals they hold,” ideals which will be more explored further in this paper.¹⁸ Not only do these results of historical-critical exegesis concern themselves with the past and the human: the past and the humans they deal with are only hypothetical.¹⁹ Regarding the second of Ratzinger’s general criticisms of this method, historical-critical exegesis too often merely focuses on the human factors in the genesis of Scripture without considering it as the work of God; without an understanding of God’s role in inspiring the Scriptures, “we risk reading Scripture as an object of historical curiosity.”²⁰ Without faith in God and faith in His Church (which will be explored further below), Scriptural interpretations are “merely preliminary and structurally incomplete efforts.”²¹ In addition, they often involve dismembering a text, dissecting it like a scientist does a laboratory specimen.²² To summarize Ratzinger’s view of the tool that is the historical-critical method: it has its proper use in assisting us to read the text in its historical context, yet it is only one tool out of many necessary, and it

¹⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today’s Debates*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 64-5.

¹⁷ Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis.”

¹⁸ Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission*, 65; Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xii.

¹⁹ Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xvii.

²⁰ Benedict, *Verbum Domini* §19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, §30.

²² Cf. Hahn, 30-31.

alone can only deal with the past and the human elements of the Scriptures, as it is unable to deal with the present, living, and divine elements. It thus has a limit, and “where it forgets this limit it becomes illogical and therefore also unscientific.”²³

Ratzinger does not merely point out the limitations of the tool itself: he also critiques the hands that hold the tool, namely, the historical-critical exegetes themselves. In his famous lecture “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis,” given in 1988, he critiques the method and suppositions of two famous pillars of historical-critical exegesis: Martin Dibelius and Rudolph Bultmann. He begins with a humorous, yet somewhat plausible, anecdote taken from a work called *A Story of the Antichrist* by Vladimir Soloviev: in this tale, the man who becomes the Biblical Antichrist is a Biblical scholar himself, being a world-renowned exegete trained at Tübingen (Ratzinger’s own *alma mater*), who, through abuse of the methods he learns, attempts to remove Christ from the world’s faith. After this cautionary tale of a (possibly exaggerated) misuse of the historical-critical method, before criticizing merely exegetes’ individual ways of using the method, Ratzinger discusses more widespread philosophical presuppositions of those using this method. A key point underlying his critique is that “there is no such thing as a pure historical method; it is always carried out in a hermeneutical or philosophical context, even when people are not aware of it or expressly deny it.”²⁴ Thus Ratzinger promotes the hermeneutic of faith, while different exegetes promote various other hermeneutics. The criterion for determining the worth and legitimacy of an interpretation is how well it explains a text without interfering with the sources.²⁵ Ratzinger’s reasons for declaring the hermeneutic of faith to be the best will be explored later; here, his criticism of other presuppositions and hermeneutics is at hand. First, there is the claim that the historical-critical method is as certain as a natural science.

²³ Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 74.

²⁴ Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 43; cf. Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 164.

²⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 44-45.

Ratzinger refutes that, stating that this form of exegesis, viewed diachronically (that is, across time, as opposed to synchronic, at one point in time), follows the history of spirituality and philosophy; in addition, even if it were a pure science, there would still be the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, which highlights the influence the observer has on what is observed.²⁶ In regards to the views of Dibelius and Bultmann, Ratzinger highlights a variety of their axioms for Scriptural interpretation which are incorrect, leading to “a reduction of history into philosophy, or a revision of history by means of philosophy”: the word comes before and trumps the event (making the event into myth), discontinuity is a fundamental principle of Scripture, the later or more complex is better than the earlier and simpler, the word defeats cult, eschatology is better than apocalyptic, the Judaic is purer than the Hellenistic, and the prophetic defeats the legal and ethical. In addition, these exegetes search for the “pure form” of the Scriptural texts, they emphasize demythologization (anything miraculous in the Scriptures is a later myth or legend), and they state that the community creates Scripture.²⁷ All of these are presuppositions used by these exegetes which lead to an incorrect interpretation of Scripture. Ratzinger’s rules for interpretation, as outlined in this lecture, are two-fold: the word and the event are equally original, and there is a continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament (both by the overall movement of history and by reference to “history’s central event, Jesus Christ”). He ends by giving a definition of the “task of interpretation”: “to recognize the inner self-transcendence of the historical word, and thus the inner correctness of subsequent rereadings in which event and meaning are gradually interwoven.”²⁸ Further critiques of the misuse of this method are found in an interview from the same decade as this lecture, where Ratzinger

²⁶ Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis.” Cf. also Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 164.

²⁷ Cf. also the quote on Hahn, 32-33, regarding the phenomenon of demythologization and contrasting divinity with history.

²⁸ Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis.”

describes how the worldview of many of these exegetes makes the world judge Scripture, rather than vice versa; in addition, the claim that one can only understand the text by knowing its sources and development is false, and it, along with other ways the method is used, make Scripture become the “object of experts” and closed to the common man.²⁹

To summarize Ratzinger’s view on the historical-critical method on the whole: it is a tool with much possibility for good, but it is often misused to the detriment of true exegesis. As a coda, he thinks it is a method past its prime: “historical-critical exegesis has already yielded its essential fruit,” and so exegesis must now become more theological than historical in order not to become irrelevant.³⁰

While Ratzinger’s main corrective to the historical-critical method is to point it towards the faith of the Church as a necessary principle and hermeneutic for Scriptural interpretation, thus leading exegesis from merely historical to theological, he also occasionally mentions a traditional Catholic paradigm for Scriptural interpretation: the four senses of Scripture. While the historical-critical method and most of modern exegesis focuses solely on the historical or literal sense, there is also the spiritual sense, divided into three senses of allegorical, tropological or moral, and anagogical. Ratzinger supports these senses—originating in Origen, codified in the Middle Ages, and brought back to prominence by the work of Henri de Lubac in his *Medieval Exegesis*—though he only mentions them rarely. In an address on Origen, he mentions the Church Father’s approach to Scriptural exegesis, mentioning how he used multiple senses of Scripture, though “historical meaning must in the first place be respected.”³¹ The four senses of Scripture “are not individual meanings arrayed side by side, but dimensions of the one word that

²⁹ Cf. Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 75-76, 144.

³⁰ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, xiv.

³¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *The Fathers* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 39.

reaches beyond the moment,” dimensions like the facets of a diamond.³² They thus complement the historical sense, without replacing it. The Scriptural words have a “surplus,” something that goes beyond the merely literal meaning; this is partly related to the “multidimensional nature of human language,” but the fact that God is the author of Scripture means that the wealth of meaning in Scriptural words transcends that found in merely human words.³³ In general, these senses are really the meanings seen when reading the Scriptures in the same Spirit in which they were written: the Holy Spirit.³⁴ Ratzinger thus sees the need for these senses, though he rarely mentions them by name.

The final piece of Ratzinger’s exegesis, and its basis, is the hermeneutic of faith, which is “a spiritual disposition toward the study of the sacred page” that necessarily includes the roles of the Church and her tradition in interpreting Scripture.³⁵ “The Bible without the Church would be just an anthology of literature,” a purely human collection of texts, and this does not do justice to the text.³⁶ Thus he declared, “Everything that shrinks our horizon and hinders us from seeing and hearing beyond that which is merely human must be opened up,” for Scripture is more than merely human: it is divinely inspired.³⁷ There is only one tool that allows the Scriptural text to be read in its divine aspect, and that is faith; more particularly, “Authentic biblical hermeneutics can only be had within the faith of the Church.”³⁸ This last phrase is key to understanding Ratzinger’s view of faith: it is the faith *of the Church*, not just the faith of the individual.³⁹ If one merely focuses on his own personal faith when reading Scripture, without recourse to the

³² Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xx.

³³ Hahn, 104; cf. *ibid.*, 109.

³⁴ Cf. Benedict, *Verbum Domini* §37.

³⁵ Hahn, 45.

³⁶ Boeve and Mannion, 43.

³⁷ Ratzinger, “Preface.”

³⁸ Benedict, *Verbum Domini* §29.

³⁹ Cf. Boeve and Mannion, 43.

Church, it is possible and likely that he could end up imposing an agenda on the text when interpreting it, even if it is not an agenda based on the historical-critical method and its philosophy. For instance, Simone Weil had faith in Christ and read the New Testament with faith, yet she would not read it with the faith *of the Church*: thus, she rejected the Old Testament as promoting a religion opposed to Christianity, similar to the ways Marcion and the Gnostics interpreted Scripture in the first few centuries after Christ. Thus Ratzinger points out that the unity between the Old and New Testaments, that unity of the texts which “belongs to the literary reality of the Bible itself,” can only be seen via faith, particularly the faith of the Church.⁴⁰ Part of this is the fact that the Biblical canon and the Church were established at the same time: indeed, Ratzinger states that these two facts are really one and the same process viewed differently.⁴¹ The Church is so intertwined with the Scripture that she is even one of its three subjects: the human author (or authors) of an individual text, the People of God or the Church, and God Himself.⁴² The great multitude of texts in Scripture are only unified due to faith: in describing how faith is the best hermeneutics for reading Scripture, Ratzinger’s two reasons are that 1) it alone can “hold fast the entire testimony” of all the sources of Scripture and 2) faith is the only hermeneutics that “in the breadth of its vision, transcends the differences of cultures, times, and people.”⁴³ Ultimately, the Church’s Tradition is the only way to truly determine if an interpretation is valid, for the exegete’s final criterion is the *sensus Ecclesiae* (the sense of the Church).⁴⁴ The fact that the faith of the Church and her tradition are inseparable from a true

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission*, 65; cf. Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 44; Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xix.

⁴¹ Cf. Boeve and Mannion, 22.

⁴² Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xx-xxi.

⁴³ Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 45.

⁴⁴ Cf. Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (London: Burns & Oates, 2007), *eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 10, 2014), 59.

interpretation of Scripture could be supported by countless of Ratzinger's quotes, but it would be more useful to show *how* one reads Scripture in tune with Tradition.⁴⁵

In reading Scripture in line with the Church and her Tradition, the first step is to accept the entirety of the text as Scripture, without dismissing various texts as inauthentic. In combatting the views of the Jesus Seminar and those who would dismiss a saying of Christ because they deem it to be inauthentic, Ratzinger holds that, no matter what such experts say, such a saying is still the Word of God because it is part of the canon of Holy Scripture: the canon, which, as seen above, was formulated by the Church.⁴⁶ Thus one reads the totality of Scripture and interprets an individual text within the *symphonia* of the entire inspired canon.⁴⁷ One reads the text with Christ as the unifying principle and the baseline of interpretation, for it is He Who is the center of the revelation testified to in Scripture (for revelation is beyond Scripture).⁴⁸ Yet one also interprets a text with the help of the Church, particularly the Church's life. Thus the liturgy, the source and summit of the Christian life, as the Second Vatican Council declared, is the privilege place to read the Scriptures, and the Church's liturgical use of a particular text is an incredible tool for interpretation.⁴⁹ In addition, the exegete should draw both from his own life experience and the entire experience of the Church and her life to assist in

⁴⁵ Just a selection of quotes would be: "The Bible is the Church's book, and its essential place in the Church's life gives rise to its genuine interpretation" (Benedict, *Verbum Domini* §29); "Apostolic authority...interprets the Word which is handed down and gives it an unequivocal clarity of meaning" (Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission*, 60); "An exegesis in which the Bible no longer lives and is understood within the living organism of the Church becomes archaeology: the dead bury their dead" (Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 75). A good summary of the importance of the Church for reading Scripture can be found in his Homily on July 7, 2005, for the Mass of his Possession of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome, quoted in Hahn, 21.

⁴⁶ Cf. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 58-59.

⁴⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission*, 83.

⁴⁸ On the relationship between revelation, Scripture, and Tradition, see the booklet *Revelation and Tradition* (1967), co-written by Ratzinger and Karl Rahner, summarized and cited in Boeve and Mannion, 14-18.

⁴⁹ Cf. Benedict, *The Fathers*, 144; Benedict, *Verbum Domini* §§52-71.

interpretation.⁵⁰ Besides the previously-mentioned historical-critical tools at the exegete's disposal, he must also use the vast resources of the Church, both the great exegetical works done by her members in the past and the living Tradition that continues today; he must use the entire history of interpretation performed by the Church.⁵¹ Finally, in all his work, the exegete must remember that, though exegesis is "autonomous" in a sense, it is also always to be done in conjunction with the Magisterium and the teaching of the Church.⁵² In this way, by uniting the tools of the historical-critical method with the living Tradition of the Church, the exegete can come to truly interpret Scripture and dig new gems from its rich depths, for "this study is never finished; each age must in its own way newly seek to understand the sacred books."⁵³

For the final section of this paper, two examples of Ratzinger's own exegesis will be quickly analyzed to show how these principles are put into effect. The first example is *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, whose title explains the subject matter well. An introductory section sets the historical context by exploring the concept of brotherhood in various lines of non-Christian thought; in addition, since Ratzinger's main exegesis is on New Testament texts, the Old Testament is included in this section.⁵⁴ While this may seem to indicate a separation between the Old Testament and New Testament as fundamentally separate entities, as separate as Marxist philosophy (also included in the historical context) and New Testament thought, Ratzinger's exegesis shows the profound link between the two Testaments: a key point in this analysis is that the New Testament at first merely takes up the Old Testament notion of brotherhood, before developing a specifically Christian notion.⁵⁵ Throughout the initial analysis,

⁵⁰ Cf. Benedict, *Verbum Domini* §30.

⁵¹ Cf. Nichols, 115.

⁵² Boeve and Mannion, 18.

⁵³ Ratzinger, "Preface."

⁵⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 5-19.

⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 21-22.

Ratzinger draws heavily on historical-critical sources and ideas, such as emphasis on the influence of the community on a particular text.⁵⁶ His analysis also focuses on the chronological development of ideas, from Jesus' own sayings to the writings of Paul and other New Testament writers.⁵⁷ However, this progress does not cease with the death of the last Apostle: Ratzinger also draws on Tradition by a quick exploration of brotherhood in the Fathers of the first three centuries.⁵⁸ All of this historical work is only the first part of his exegesis, though, for he then continues to "an attempt at synthesis," which draws on various sources such as St. Cyprian, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Meister Eckhart, Karl Barth, and Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁵⁹ This is the theological portion of his exegesis, focusing on ideas such as how the fatherhood of God is the foundation of Christian brotherhood and how the Eucharist must be "the sacrament of brotherhood."⁶⁰ His analysis covers the range of spiritual senses (without specifically naming them), and it has a theological aim. Thus this work gives a great example of the use of Ratzinger's principles: it uses the historical-critical method without being too dependent on it or being ensnared in incorrect philosophical presuppositions, it explores how the texts speak to us in moral and anagogical ways, and it is in line with the Church's life and Tradition (though the magisterial teaching is not specifically mentioned).

Ratzinger's *Daughter Zion* also includes examples of his exegesis, this time revolving around Mary. The method used is considerably different from *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*. He begins with an exploration of the Old Testament roots of Mariology by covering various themes involving the theology of woman in the Old Testament; specifically, this exploration is reading the Old Testament "'backwards,' from the viewpoint of the New

⁵⁶ Cf. for example, *ibid.*, 23,27.

⁵⁷ On Jesus' sayings, cf. *ibid.*, 21-29; on the other New Testament writers, cf. *ibid.*, 30-37.

⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 37-40.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 45-84.

⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 45, 69.

Testament; we considered the Old Testament as present in the New.”⁶¹ The unity between the Testaments is thus *the* key principle for his exegesis in this work. His analysis is in no way strictly historical-critical: in fact, there are considerable rebukes to the results of historical-critical exegetes with incorrect presuppositions.⁶² After his introductory exploration of the Old Testament, Ratzinger takes a different tack by beginning with magisterial teaching (the three Marian dogmas) and then showing how they arose from the Scriptural texts and the Church’s Tradition.⁶³ The first dogma (Mary as virgin and mother) is the one with the most exegesis; he first analyzes texts from Paul, Matthew, Luke, and John, and then he interprets the texts theologically.⁶⁴ The second dogma is built around the doctrine of typology, which dates back to the Scriptural authors themselves (such as Paul’s Adam typology found in his First Epistle to the Corinthians); this analysis is decidedly less historical-critical than the first.⁶⁵ For the final dogma, he argues that the Assumption is a consequence of Marian veneration, not of any Scriptural text, though there are still small exegeses of certain texts.⁶⁶ In general, this work shows a more heavily theological side of Ratzinger’s exegesis than *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*; while historical-critical methodology is involved, theological methodology is much more prominent, in particular the links to Tradition, the Church’s living life of Marian worship, and magisterial teaching, which serves as the foundation for the second half of the work.

In conclusion, Ratzinger’s theology highlights the importance of accurate exegesis of Scriptural texts. The use of historical-critical methods is necessary and good, as understanding

⁶¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church’s Marian Belief*, trans. John M. McDermott (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 31; cf. 7-29.

⁶² For instance, he references the idea that Mary is just the Christian version of the goddess Diana at Ephesus (ibid., 9-11), and later he rebukes Dibelius’ view that the virgin birth is a “theologoumenon” found only in Paul and Philo (ibid., 39, n. 3, and 40, n. 4).

⁶³ Cf. ibid., 31-82.

⁶⁴ Cf. ibid., 38-61.

⁶⁵ Cf. ibid., 62-71.

⁶⁶ Cf. ibid., 72-82.

the historical sense of a text is preliminary to any further interpretation; however, these methods are only one limited tool, so they cannot be made the be-all and end-all of exegesis. This tool cannot be used on its own, and it has limits that must be recognized. In addition, these methods are often used with faulty philosophical presuppositions that lead to false conclusions. Exegesis should involve more than just historical analysis: the traditional spiritual senses of Scripture have a role too. What is more important, though, is Tradition itself: Scripture must be read and interpreted in communion with the Church and her living Tradition. Thus faith, particularly faith in the Church, is a necessary prerequisite for correct exegesis. Faith and Tradition must be constant factors in an exegete's work for it to be truly valid Biblical interpretation. Two works by Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* and *Daughter Zion*, give examples of how these exegetical principles can be put into practice in various ways. Ratzinger thus gives workable principles for exegesis that lead to an accurate interpretation of Scripture that reveals the Word to us as present, living, and active, allowing us to draw ever closer to He Whose Word it is.

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