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Good Fences and Good Neighbors? Biblical Scholars and Theologians

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Introduction

A curious coincidence of two events set in motion the thinking that now finds expression for your consideration in this essay, with its deliberately ambiguous title, "Good Fences and Good Neighbors? Biblical Scholars and Theologians." First came the American Academy of Religion (AAR) Board of Directors' self-proclaimed "historic decision" "to hold stand-alone AAR Annual Meetings beginning in 2008." That is, as of 2008 the AAR will to discontinue the practice, begun in 1970, of holding its annual meeting jointly with the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). The AAR Board explained, "While the AAR has enjoyed a long and beneficial relationship with the SBL, which has included joint and/or concurrent annual meetings, the Board's decision comes primarily out of the recognition that the identities and missions of the two associations are distinct and different and that the current structure of the annual meetings has become unwieldy. We have decided that independent annual meetings will best serve AAR's

*An earlier version of this essay was originally presented at the June 2003 convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am grateful to the participants, and especially to the convener of the Latino/a Theology Group, Gary Riebe-Estrella, for their insights. See Gary Riebe-Estrella, "Hispanic / Latino/a Theology," in *Proceedings of the Fifty-eighth Annual Convention*, ed. Richard C. Sparks (NP: Catholic Theological Society of America, 2003) 147-148.

mission.” The Board expressed its view that this decision “seems to us the best way to serve the Academy and its members, to clarify the Academy’s identity vis-à-vis the other societies and in relation to the wider American [sic] academic environment, and to foster the ongoing diversity, intellectual richness, and vitality of the AAR.”¹

How things have changed since 1909, when three scholars—Ismar Peritz of Syracuse University, Irving Wood of Smith College, and Olive Dutcher of Mount Holyoke College—founded the Association of Biblical Instructors in American Colleges and Secondary Schools,” the scholarly society that changed its name to the National Association of Biblical Instructors in 1922 and that was incorporated as the American Academy of Religion in 1964.² As for the AAR Board’s April 2003 decision, one might speculate whether its self-proclaimed historic quality has as much to do with its negative impact on the budgets of scholars who belong both to the AAR and to the SBL, and who therefore face the added expense of having to cover the cost of attending two annual meetings, as it does with the way in which the AAR decision symbolizes an ongoing erosion of the common ground between biblical scholarship and other disciplines in the academic study of religion.

The second element constituting this curious coincidence was the commemoration of the centenary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Inaugurated by Pope Leo XIII with the apostolic letter *Vigilantiae studii* of October 30, 2002,³ the Commission was designed “to strive and effect with all possible care that God’s words will both be given, everywhere among us, that thorough study that our times

¹The announcement can be found on the American Academy of Religion Web site at <http://www.aarweb.org/annualmeet/decision.asp> (Accessed April 4, 2007).

²“A Brief History of the American Academy of Religion,” <http://www.aarweb.org/about/history.asp> (Accessed April 4, 2007). The Society of Biblical Literature was founded in 1880. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Rethinking the Educational Practices of Biblical Doctoral Studies,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 6:2 (April 2003) 65-75; Thomas Olbricht, “Biblical Interpretation in North America in the Twentieth Century,” in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998); idem, “Histories of North American Biblical Scholarship,” *Current Research in Biblical Studies* 7 (1999) 237-256.

³Pope Leo XIII, “*Vigilantiae studii*,” *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 35 (1902-1903) 234-238.

demand and will be shielded not only from every breath of error but even from every rash opinion.”⁴ Originally constituted of cardinals appointed by the pope and assisted by biblical scholars serving as consultors, the commission functioned as an instrument of the papal magisterium, and its decisions were to be received by the Catholic faithful with religious assent. In 1910 Pope Pius X insisted: “All are bound in conscience to submit to the decisions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission pertaining to doctrine, whether already issued or to be issued in the future, in the same way as to the decrees of the Sacred Congregations approved by the Pontiff; nor can they avoid the stigma both of disobedience and temerity or be free from grave sin who by any spoken or written words impugn these decisions.”⁵ Originally constituted as a curial agency of the papal magisterium, the Biblical Commission worked as an aggressive guardian against the incursions of Modernism and other perceived challenges to the depositum fidei, especially those posed by the nascent historical critical method in European Protestant scholarship. In his May 2003 remarks during the commemoration of the Commission’s centenary, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger reflected on the excesses of the Commission’s beginnings, acknowledging the tensions between the hierarchy and biblical scholars in the early decades of the twentieth century and admitting that the “magisterium amplified too much the ambit of certainties and limited the space for exegesis.”⁶

With the apostolic brief *Sedula Cura* in 1971,⁷ Pope Paul VI reformed and restructured the Pontifical Biblical Commission, prompted by the Second Vatican Council’s breezes of *aggiornamento* that prescribed “that the rich treasures of the Word of God be made more amply available to the faithful” and by awareness of the ways in which the “progress of modern scholarship daily presents new questions in this discipline [biblical studies] which are not easy to resolve.”⁸ As

⁴“Vigilantiae studiiue,” as translated in Jan Lambrecht, “Pontifical Biblical Commission,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Second edition, ed. Berard Marthaler (Detroit: Gale, 2003) 11:476.

⁵Lambrecht, “Pontifical Biblical Commission,” 477.

⁶<http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=35005> (Accessed May 24, 2007).

⁷*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 63 (1971) 665-669.

⁸Lambrecht, “Pontifical Biblical Commission,” 477.

reorganized according to the specifications of *Sedula Cura*, the Commission's twenty members are no longer curial cardinals but biblical scholars "from various schools and nations" appointed by the pope to five-year terms, under the presidency of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. With this change in composition came a corresponding change in the nature and function of the Commission, leaving behind its watchdog role and taking up a consultative function. According to Cardinal Ratzinger, since 1972 the Biblical Commission "is not just an organ of the magisterium but a place of meeting and dialogue between representatives of the magisterium and qualified exegetes."⁹ As the Biblical Commission itself explained in 1993: "The Pontifical Biblical Commission, in its new form after the Second Vatican Council, is not an organ of the teaching office, but rather a commission of scholars who, in their scientific and ecclesial responsibility as professional exegetes, take positions on important problems of Scriptural interpretation and who know that for this task they enjoy the confidence of the teaching office."¹⁰ This repurposing is reflected in the shift in the genre of the Commission's publications from the regulatory *responsa* of its first fifty years to the lengthy instructions of the last fifty years.¹¹ Among the latter, the Commission's 1964 instruction *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* on the historical truth of the gospels found itself incorporated into the text of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council (*Dei Verbum* 19). More recently, the Commission published *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* in 1993, an instruc-

⁹<http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=35005> (Accessed June 1, 2003).

¹⁰*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993).

¹¹See Albert Vanhoye, "Passé et présent de la Commission Biblique," *Gregorianum* 74 (1993) 261-275. Vanhoye, a professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, served as secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Also see Raymond E. Brown and Thomas Aquinas Collins, "Church Pronouncements," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) 1166-1174. It is puzzling and unfortunate to observe how little attention has been given to the Biblical Commission's most recent instruction, the groundbreaking *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (available on the World Wide Web at <http://bit.ly/2q8ZSiU>). (Accessed April 4, 2007).

tion that promoted a positive and mutually enriching relationship between biblical scholarship and other theological disciplines.¹² The Commission recognized that

[E]xegesis has close and complex relationships with other fields of theological learning. On the one hand, systematic theology has an influence upon the presuppositions with which exegetes approach biblical texts. On the other hand, exegesis provides the other theological disciplines with data fundamental for their operation. There is, accordingly, a relationship of dialogue between exegesis and the other branches of theology, granted always a mutual respect for that which is specific to each.¹³

In *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, the Biblical Commission clearly notes, that “Catholic exegesis does not claim any particular scientific method as its own;” and likewise, “Catholic exegesis actively contributes to the development of new methods and to the progress of research.”¹⁴

While the reorganization of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and the renewal of Catholic biblical scholarship in the latter part of the twentieth century that its reorganization reflects have not been without complication or controversy,¹⁵ the trajectory toward rapprochement between biblical studies and theological scholarship over

¹²See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Biblical Commission’s document, ‘The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church:’ Text and Commentary” (*Subsidia Biblica* 18; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1995).

¹³“The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” in Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission’s Document*, 161. The text of *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* is also available on the Internet at: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/PBCINTER.HTM> (Accessed May 24, 2007).

¹⁴The instruction makes reference to the historical-critical method; to methods of literary criticism including rhetorical analysis, narrative analysis, semiotic analysis; approaches based on tradition including canonical criticism; traditional Jewish approaches to biblical interpretation; *Wirkungsgeschichte*; social scientific approaches (sociological, anthropological and psychological); and contextual approaches including liberationist interpretation and feminist criticism.

¹⁵See Joseph Ratzinger, “Foundations and Approaches of Biblical Exegesis,” *Origins* 17:35 (1988) 593-601; Richard J. Neuhaus, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

the last hundred years seems a curious reverse mirror-image of the opposite century-long tendency demonstrated most recently in the AAR Board's decision to hold its annual meeting separately from the Society of Biblical Literature.

Business as Usual?

In mainstream postconciliar Roman Catholic academic circles, the division of labor between biblical scholars and theologians — systematic and otherwise — came to be inscribed as a methodological commonplace, typically along the lines suggested in the famous 1962 article on biblical theology in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, by the Lutheran biblical scholar Krister Stendahl, whereby the biblical scholar was assigned responsibility for determining what the text meant, while it was left up to the theologian to explicate what the text means for believers today.¹⁶ Thus, in his highly influential *Method in Theology*, Bernard Lonergan suggested that it is the work of the exegete *qua* exegete to attend to the understanding of texts, an activity “which pertains to the first phase of theology, to theology not as speaking to the present but as listening, as coming to listen to the past.”¹⁷ When addressing theological colleagues, says Lonergan, the exegete

will appear to be happy to proceed slowly, and often he will follow the ways of beginners. His descriptions will convey a feeling for things long past; they will give the reader an impression of the foreign, the strange, the archaic; his care for genuineness will appear in the choice of a vocabulary as biblical as possible; and he will be careful to avoid any premature

¹⁶Krister Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary,” in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962).

¹⁷Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1972) 168. Here Lonergan acknowledges his debt to Albert Descamps, “Réflexions sur la méthode en théologie biblique,” *Sacra Pagina* (Paris: Gabalda; Gembloux: Duculot, 1959) 1:142f. In 1973, Bishop Descamps, former rector of the Catholic University of Leuven, was appointed secretary of the reorganized Pontifical Biblical Commission.

transposition to later language, even though that language is approved by a theological tradition.¹⁸

For Lonergan, the biblical exegete's contribution to the larger theological enterprise is indispensable: "While every theologian has to have some training in exegesis, he cannot become a specialist in all fields." However, the theologian *qua theologian* goes further than exegesis: while the exegete of ancient texts very properly gives an impression of the foreign, the strange, the archaic, his readers cannot be content to leave it at that.¹⁹

In their handbook, *The Bible for Theology: Ten Principles for the Theological Use of Scripture*, Gerald O'Collins and Daniel Kendall begin by noting how "For much of Christian history theologians and biblical interpreters were identical; the same persons faced the task both of exegeting the whole Bible and translating it into their theology. In the last century or two scriptural scholars and systematic theologians have normally belonged to distinct specializations. When using the Bible, theologians need to ask among other things: What are the exegetes saying?"²⁰ In what follows, they articulate and illustrate ten principles for the use of the Bible in systematic theology that they recommend "as guidelines in moving from the scriptures to theology."²¹ These principles are:

1. *The Principle of Faithful Hearing.* The scriptures require theologians to be faithful and regular hearers of the inspired texts.
2. *The Principle of Active Hearing.* Responsible theologians are active interpreters of the scriptures, appropriating them within the contexts of prayer, study and action.
3. *The Principle of the Community and Its Creeds.* The Scriptures call for a theological interpretation and appropriation within the living community of faith and in the light of its classic creeds.

¹⁸Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 171.

¹⁹Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 172.

²⁰Gerald O'Collins and Daniel Kendall, *The Bible for Theology: Ten Principles for the Theological Use of Scripture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 1.

²¹O'Collins and Kendall, *The Bible for Theology*, 6.

4. *The Principle of Biblical Convergence.* Convergent biblical testimony can bear on the theological questions being examined.
5. *The Principle of Exegetical Consensus.* Where available, the consensus of centrist exegetes guides systematic theology.
6. *The Principle of Metathemes and Metanarratives.* Theological appropriation of the Bible takes account of metathemes and metanarratives.
7. *The Principle of Continuity within Discontinuity.* Various discontinuities within continuities affect the theological “taking over” of the Bible.
8. *The Principle of Eschatological Provisionality.* Their eschatological provisionality regulates the theological role of scriptures.
9. *The Principle of Philosophical Assistance.* The passage from the Bible to theology takes place in dialogue with philosophy.
10. *The Principle of Inculturation.* The task of inculturation helps to shape any theological appropriation of the scriptures.²²

Although a detailed consideration of O’Collins and Kendall lies outside the scope of this essay, it is sufficient to note that they, like Lonergan, accept the *de facto* division of labor among exegetes and systematic theologians. Their ten principles suggest that the differences between exegetical discourses and systematic theological discourses are actually mutually enriching and not irreparably irreconcilable. Their fifth principle, however, does call for some comment. O’Collins and Kendall explain that by the “principle of exegetical consensus” they propose “the willingness of theologians to prefer, all things being equal, the line taken by widely respected, centrist biblical scholars, or at least the majority of them.” They further suggest: “In reflecting on the scriptural texts, theologians ought not plunge forward by themselves and ignore what professional exegetes have to say. However they cannot remain stuck on major questions, waiting for a universal consensus to emerge in biblical studies; experience

²²O’Collins and Kendall, *The Bible for Theology*, 6-7.

shows that such a consensus on some questions may never emerge. It is also obviously ill-advised to take over into theology adventurous, even maverick, theses advanced by individual biblical scholars or a small group with its own particularist agenda."²³ What remains unsettled by O'Collins and Kendall is the important question of the criteria by which any given systematic theologian might discern who the "centrist" biblical scholars and who the "mavericks" might be on any given question. Indeed the identification of "centrist" biblical scholars and how one might distinguish them from advocates of particularist agendas is a matter that is fraught with difficulty. After all, if, as O'Collins and Kendall suggest, consensus among exegetes is not always (or even often) forthcoming, it follows that consensus over what constitutes centrist exegesis is at least as hard to come by. Furthermore, the determination of where the center lies depends on who is drawing the maps. More bluntly stated, these determinations often have as much to do with the agendas of academic and ecclesiastical gatekeepers as they have to do with the persuasive power of the exegetes' own arguments.

The rocky reception of the historical critical approach within Roman Catholic circles in the second half of the twentieth century itself serves as a convenient illustration of this dilemma. At one extreme, consider, for instance, the hostility of George Kelly (among others) against the likes of Raymond E. Brown.²⁴ The characterization of Brown's exegetical and theological attitudes by his friends and colleagues as a matter of near-pathological equanimity notwithstanding, elements of the Catholic right wing in the United States spilled no small amount of ink going after Brown and other Catholic exegetes for their embrace of what they (mis)perceive as the insidious historical-critical subversion of the Church's received understanding of the scriptures.²⁵ A few years earlier, in his

²³O'Collins and Kendall, *The Bible for Theology*, 25.

²⁴George A. Kelly, *The New Biblical Theorists: Raymond E. Brown and Beyond* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1983).

²⁵See the spirited defense of the Catholic appropriation of the historical critical approach mounted by Joseph Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism: its Role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 249-252.

January 1988 Erasmus Lecture at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York, Cardinal Ratzinger began in the following way:

In Wladimir Solowjew's *History of the Antichrist*, the eschatological enemy of the Redeemer recommended himself to believers, among other things, by the fact that he had earned his doctorate in theology at Tübingen and had written an exegetical work which was recognized as pioneering in the field! With this paradox Solowjew sought to shed light on the ambivalence inherent in biblical exegetical methodology for almost a hundred years now. To speak of the crisis of the historical-critical method today is practically a truism.²⁶

In *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, the Pontifical Biblical Commission itself voiced in more measured terms a certain ambivalence toward the historical critical approach: "the fact is that at the very time when the most prevalent scientific method — the 'historical-critical method' — is freely practiced in exegesis, including Catholic exegesis, it is itself brought into question. To some extent, this has come about in the scholarly world itself through the rise of alternative methods and approaches. But it has also arisen through the criticisms of many members of the faithful, who judge the method deficient from the point of view of faith."²⁷ As for the plurality of methods and approaches involved in what it refers to as "scientific" exegesis (read *Wissenschaft*), the Biblical Commission acknowledges the critique of some who suggest:

Instead of making for easier and more secure access to the living sources of God's word, it makes of the Bible a closed book. Interpretation may always have been something of a problem, but now it requires such technical refinements as to render it a domain reserved to a few specialists alone. To the latter some apply the phrase of the Gospel: "You have taken away the key of knowledge; you have not entered in yourselves

²⁶"Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today," in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis*, 1.

²⁷*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, in Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document*, 19.

and you have hindered those who sought to enter' (Lk 11:52; cf. Mt. 23:13).²⁸

Making the case for a return to what he calls the theological interpretation of Scripture, Stephen Fowl presents the dilemma of the historical critical approach in the following terms:

One of the long-term results of historical critical methods of reading was to separate the practice of reading the Bible in a manner geared toward historical reconstruction from the practice of developing a theologically significant reading. By the time it came to dominate biblical study in America [sic], historical criticism had largely become separated from the theological ends it was initially meant to serve. While most biblical scholars of both Testaments still continue to identify themselves as Christians, they generally are required to check their theological convictions at the door when they enter the profession of biblical studies.²⁹

Furthermore, in Fowl's judgment, business-as-usual in the theological disciplines has become fragmented, with biblical scholars and systematic theologians working

largely in isolation from one another and often for very different ends. As a result, the work of professional biblical scholars is often seen by professional theologians as both too technical and too irrelevant for their own interests. Further, professional biblical scholars tend to find the interests of, for example, systematic theologians abstract and ill suited to their professional interests in the Bible.³⁰

²⁸*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, in Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document*, 21.

²⁹Stephen E. Fowl, "Introduction," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997) xiii-xiv. Also see idem, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), especially 1-31.

³⁰Stephen E. Fowl, "Introduction," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, xv. At times, biblical scholars qua practitioners of historical critical approaches have taken great pains to insist that they are engaged in strictly historical and not

Sadly, it would seem that the AAR's unilateral decision to separate its annual meeting from the annual meeting of the SBL confirms the conclusion that we have arrived at an impasse in the relationship between biblical scholarship and other disciplines in the academic study of religion.

The assault on the historical-critical approach has not been limited to the voices of those who have found fault with its rationalist disdain for premodern interpretive strategies or with its diachronic dismantling of the Church's "received understanding" of the scriptures. Feminist biblical scholars and theologians and practitioners of contextual interpretations of the Bible have also challenged the pretense to objectivity of the historical-critical approach and they have unmasked it as a set of contextual discourses that reflects the interests and the presuppositions of economically privileged western European Christian male readers.³¹

theological research. For example, in Volume 3 of his massive study, *A Marginal Jew*, John P. Meier reminds his readers, tongue-in-cheek, of what his historical investigation of the "historical Jesus" involves: "To illustrate what a historical as distinct from a theological investigation of Jesus must involve, I have proposed the fantasy of the 'unpapal conclave': a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jew, and an agnostic — all honest historians cognizant of 1st-century religious movements — are locked up in the bowels of the Harvard Divinity School library, put on a Spartan diet, and not allowed to emerge until they have hammered out a consensus document on Jesus of Nazareth" (*A Marginal Jew*, Volume 3: Companions and Competitors (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 9). Despite the enormous erudition and critical acumen Meier displays in this exceptionally valuable study, and despite the explicit modesty of his own goals, the project's blind spot is its lack of historiographical-hermeneutical sophistication, its uncomplicated embrace of history as the narrative of "how things really happened."

³¹Fernando F. Segovia writes, "In terms of theory and methodology, the historical paradigm was remarkably inbred, and thoroughly hegemonic. The theoretical discussion, such as it was, consisted mostly of an in-house affair conducted within certain well-established parameters: acquaintance with the various stages of historical criticism and a reading of previous exegesis on the area of research in question. Dialogue with other critical models and disciplines was largely nonexistent" ("And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues': Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism," in *Reading from this Place*. Volume 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 13. Also see William H. Myers, "The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African-American Biblical Student" in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder

If *all* interpretation is contextual, as I believe it is, it must follow that the notion of “centrist” biblical exegesis is illusory, and that other strategies must be sought for bringing biblical scholars and systematic theologians into productive conversations.³²

Fences and Neighbors at the Galilean Border

Relatively little deliberate attention has been devoted either by U.S. Hispanic theologians or biblical scholars to the exploration of ground rules or grammar for interdisciplinary conversations with each other. To be sure, there is a growing body of contextual biblical interpretation by U.S. Hispanic Catholics and Protestants, and U.S. Hispanic biblical scholars have been participants in collaborative projects to reconfigure systematic theology *latinamente*, but thus far there is nothing that approximates the project of O’Collins and Kendall that offers guidelines for using the Bible theologically *latinamente*.³³ If and

(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 40-56; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); Kwok Pui Lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³²Among Latino/a biblical scholars and theologians, Fernando F. Segovia’s proposal for what he calls intercultural criticism is especially promising. See Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Jean-Pierre Ruiz, “Reading Across Canons: U.S. Hispanic Reflections on Globalization and the Senses of Scripture,” *Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology* 10:4 (May 2003).

³³See the review of U.S. Hispanic biblical interpretation by Fernando F. Segovia, “Toward Intercultural Criticism: A Reading Strategy from the Diaspora,” in *Reading from this Place*. Volume 2: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective, eds. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 303-330. Also see Justo L. González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Miguel A. de la Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Jean-Pierre Ruiz, “Beginning to Read the Bible in Spanish: An Initial Assessment,” *Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology* 1:2 (February 1994) 28-50; idem, “Tell the Next Generation: Racial and Ethnic Minority Scholars and the Future of Biblical Studies,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2001) 649-671. On the ongoing project sponsored by the University of San Diego’s Center for the Study of Latino/a Catholicism to reconfigure systematic theology *latinamente*, see Orlando O. Espín and Miguel H.

when we arrive at the point where such guidelines might be sketched, and at the point where we agreed to abide by such guidelines, their configuration is sure to be quite different from the uncomplicated business-as-usual genre of the ten principles formulated by O'Collins and Kendall.

For the moment, I would like to consider just one specific example of the use of the Bible in U.S. Hispanic theology, focusing on a seminal work by the "father" of U.S. Hispanic theology, that is, Virgilio Elizondo's *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise*.³⁴ The choice of this book as a point of entry into a discussion of the place of biblical scholarship in conversation with U.S. Hispanic theologies has mainly to do with the abiding influence it has exerted among U.S. Hispanic Catholic systematic theologians — an influence convincingly documented in the dollars-and-cents of the publishing world by the appearance of a revised and expanded edition in 2000, seventeen years after the publication of the first edition in 1983. The abiding influence of *Galilean Journey* for U.S. Hispanic systematic theology is evident, for example, in Roberto Goizueta's *Caminemos con Jesús*. Goizueta writes, "In his groundbreaking work, *Galilean Journey*, for example, Virgilio Elizondo has demonstrated that an important aspect of Jesus' poverty was his Galilean roots. Not only was Jesus the son of a carpenter, but he was from Nazareth, from the borderlands, hardly the center of civilized life. Coming from an area where different cultures, races, religions and languages constantly mixed, Galileans were impure 'half-breeds' — in a word,

Díaz, eds., *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Systematic Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), including the essay by Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "The Bible and U.S. Hispanic American Theological Discourse: Lessons from a Non-Innocent History" (100-120). Also see Francisco García-Treto, "Reading the Hyphens: An Emerging Biblical Hermeneutics for Latino / Hispanic U.S. Protestants," in *Protestantes / Protestants: Hispanic Christianity within Mainline Traditions*, ed. David Maldonado, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999) 160-173.

³⁴Revised and expanded edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000). See the discussion of Elizondo's work from a different angle by Benjamin Valentín, "Nuevos Odres para el Vino: A Critical Contribution to Latino/a Theological Construction," *Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology* 5:4 (May 1998) 30-47.

mestizos.”³⁵ In support of this observation, Goizueta provides the following lengthy quotation from *Galilean Journey*:

At the time of Jesus, Galilee was peopled by Phoenicians, Syrians, Arabs, Greeks, Orientals and Jews ... [.] A natural ongoing biological and cultural mestizaje was taking place. The Jews were scorned by the Gentiles and the Galilean Jews were regarded with patronizing contempt by the “pure-minded” Jews of Jerusalem. The natural mestizaje of Galilee was a sign of impurity and a cause for rejection ... from the time of Solomon the land of Galilee had come to be known as the land of Cabul, which in itself meant “like nothing” or “very displeasing.” The connotation remained and the inhabitants of the region came to be looked down on and considered good for nothing ... [.] In the wisdom of God, it is precisely here in this impure, culturally mixed, freedom-loving, rebellious region that God made the historical beginning of his visible reign on earth. One cannot follow the way of the Lord without appreciating the scandalous way of Jesus the Galilean.³⁶

Without further comment, Goizueta then declares, “The power of U.S. Hispanic popular Catholicism derives precisely from the fact that, in its narratives, symbols and rituals, God is identified with the half-breed, the racially and culturally marginalized. Jesus is a Galilean, and Mary is la Morenita.”³⁷

Goizueta follows the same trajectory in his contribution to the *Beyond Borders: Writings of Virgilio Elizondo and Friends*, in an essay entitled “A Christology for a Global Church,” Goizueta declares, “Beyond the Christ of the kings and princes, beyond the Christ of the theologians and philosophers, beyond the Christ of the clerics and bishops, is the Christ of Juan Diego. This Christ is found not primarily in Jerusalem but in Galilee.” At second hand, Goizueta contends that recent scholarship on Galilee “corroborate[s] the insights that

³⁵Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic / Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995) 188.

³⁶Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 51-54, as cited in Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 188.

³⁷Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 188.

Virgilio Elizondo presented in his doctoral thesis nearly a quarter century ago.”³⁸

Even more recently, in his well-received presentation of a U.S. Hispanic theological anthropology undertaken in deliberate dialogue with the work of Karl Rahner, Miguel H. Díaz also nods with reverence in the direction of Elizondo’s *Galilean Journey*. Díaz writes, “For Elizondo, Galilee and the Galileans — the persons with whom Jesus identified, and the place associated with these persons — become the central *loci* of divine and human revelation.” Díaz goes on to observe that while Elizondo “understands the mestizo identity of the Galileans as the unexpected cultural reality of encountering grace, he sees in their social marginalization a locus for understanding the preferential nature of this encounter. Beyond the latter, Elizondo understands the marginalizing experiences of the Galileans as something that predisposes them to receive God’s grace.”³⁹ Like Goizueta, Díaz illustrates his conclusion with a citation from Elizondo that discloses Elizondo’s debt to the Latin American liberationist notion of the hermeneutical privilege of the poor:

The apparent nonimportance and rejection of Galilee are the very bases for its all-important role in the historic eruption of

³⁸Roberto S. Goizueta, “A Christology for a Global Church,” in *Beyond Borders: Writings of Virgilio Elizondo and Friends*, ed. Timothy Matovina (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000) 150. Recent years have indeed witnessed a flurry of important scholarship about Galilee from the pens of biblical scholars and archaeologists. See, for example, Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995); idem, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996); Eric M. Meyers, ed., *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (Duke Judaic Studies Series 1: Second International Conference on Galilee in Antiquity; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999); Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-Examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000); Marianne Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee: Architectures of Contact in the Occupied Land of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000). Far from supporting Goizueta’s expansive claim, the complexity of this body of research itself recommends modesty with respect to affirmations about the first century economic, political, religious and social, context of Jesus; and even greater modesty in bridging the distance between the first and the twenty-first centuries of our era.

³⁹Miguel H. Díaz, *On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahnerian Perspectives* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001) 28.

God's saving plan for humanity. The human scandal of God's way does not begin with the cross, but with the historico-cultural incarnation of his Son in Galilee. The Galilean Jews appear to have been despised by all and, because of the mixture of cultures of the area, they were especially despised by the superiority-minded Jerusalem Jews. Could anything good come out of such an impure, mixed-up and rebellious area? Yet it is precisely within this area of multiple rejection that the restlessness for liberation and the anxiety for the kingdom of God was the greatest.⁴⁰

Díaz affirms, "Elizondo's understanding of the Galilean identity of Jesus makes known what the Kingdom is like, and how to enable its presence in the world...[.] The Kingdom, suggests Elizondo in his observations above, becomes known in the face of 'Galileans.' And in communities that have embraced socio-cultural mixture, rather than purity."⁴¹

Elizondo himself took advantage of the opportunity provided by the publication of the revised and expanded edition of *Galilean Journey* to reflect on the genesis of the book as his doctoral dissertation presented at the Institut Catholique in Paris in 1978 with the title, *Mestissage, violence culturelle, annonce de l'évangile*, a project at which Elizondo arrived after significant pastoral experience and in response to the urgings of Professor Jacques Audinet. Elizondo himself reminisces:

After much reading, searching with my thesis committee, prayer, and long walks in the parks of Paris, all of a sudden the direction of my thesis became clear. The element that would connect all the materials I had gathered and provide the key point of theological interpretation would be the closest friend and companion of our people: *El Nazareno*, Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee. This was not so obvious to my thesis committee, but as they grasped what I was trying to do, they too became very excited. Yes, that was it: I would present our socio-cultural reality together with its cultural expression, then do

⁴⁰Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 53, as cited in Díaz, *On Being Human*, 28.

⁴¹Díaz, *On Being Human*, 29.

a cultural reading of the gospel matrix (every reading is a cultural reading), and then offer a gospel interpretation of our Mexican-American reality and challenge. The journey of the Galilean Jesus through his particular history and culture would offer a point of departure for interpreting our own reality.⁴²

Oh how wistfully familiar that process of brainstorming and negotiation with one's doctoral committee sounds to those of us who have been through those arcane rites of passage into the guild! Elizondo continues:

I knew a lot about Jesus' time in history but came to some exciting new insights as I discovered more and more about his cultural reality, the cultural reality of Galilee. It turned out to be very much like the Mexican Southwest of the United States. Since his Galilean identity and the Galilean identity of the disciples is so often mentioned, and especially at the core moments of the gospel narrative, it must have special significance...The christologies I knew, written from the dominant cultures, had made no special mention of Galilee. But for me, the Galilean identity of Jesus became the most important interpretive key for my thesis, as it would continue to be in all my subsequent work.⁴³

Let us be completely clear: Elizondo himself has never claimed to be a trained exegete. In *Galilean Journey*, his work took shape in conversation with what he and the professors who reviewed his doctoral dissertation regarded as reputable biblical exegetes. He explains, "We take the exegetical studies of biblical experts seriously, but we do not attempt to simply reproduce or broadcast them; we want to bring out their concrete salvific implications."⁴⁴ That being the case, we must reckon squarely with the well-founded critique of his work by Mary Boys. In *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding*, Boys — who is herself not an exegete but a practical theologian (the Skinner and McAlpin Professor of Practi-

⁴²Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, xvii.

⁴³Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, xvii-xviii.

⁴⁴Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 48.

cal Theology at Union Theological Seminary) — observes, “Unfortunately, some liberation theologians have gone considerably beyond what is known about Galilee in the first century in order to embellish their thesis about Jesus’ identification with marginal people. Scholarship simply does not support the sweeping generalizations they draw.”⁴⁵ For Boys, Elizondo’s *Galilean Journey* is a banner instance of these tragic excesses. Consider, for example, the following quotation from *Galilean Journey*. Elizondo writes:

Galileans maintained a refreshing originality in Judaism. It was a combination of the commonsense, grass-roots wisdom of practical expertise, their more open and personal relations with foreigners, and their relative distance from Jerusalem. Their hospitable and fertile land gave them a warmer, more optimistic outlook on life than the Judean Jews had. Distance from and daily contact with foreigners were characteristic of the Galilean Jew. The intellectual preoccupation of Jerusalem, with its various schools, hardly reached Galilee. The Galilean faith in the god of the fathers was thus more personal, purer, simpler, and more spontaneous. It was not encumbered or suffocated by the religious scrupulosities of the Jewish intelligentsia.⁴⁶

Whether intentionally or otherwise, in these lines Elizondo lapses into a ruralist romanticism verging on anti-intellectualism — a rare and unfortunate combination for a volume that began as a doctoral

⁴⁵Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self Understanding* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000) 314, n. 19. Boys is very clear about her own positive view of the goals of liberation theologies, but she is equally clear about the shortcomings of the portrayal of Jews and Judaism in the work of some liberationists: “I am sympathetic to liberation theologies and indebted to its practitioners for their rereading of the tradition, commitment to the poor and minorities, and critique of Western, white, middle-class Christianity. I take exception, however, to the caricature of Judaism that has too often accompanied liberation theologies since their inception. Consequently, many people drawn to liberation theology because of their own commitments to the poor have unwittingly reinforced the teaching of contempt. Ironically — and therefore, perhaps most insidiously — this anti-Judaism has even infected “liberation theologies in areas where there are few Jews, such as Asia” (*Has God Only One Blessing?* 13).

⁴⁶Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 51-52.

dissertation! That odd anti-intellectualism cum anti-Judaism is a persistent motif in *Galilean Journey*. Elizondo writes: “was also the site of the greater rabbinical schools where Jews went to study so that eventually they could become “doctors.” The scribes—that is, the degreed intellectuals—considered themselves to have a monopoly on knowledge and its power. They alone were the authorized interpreters of the law. They dominated the masses through a type of intellectual moralism inasmuch as they imposed their knowledge as God’s way.”⁴⁷ Baser still is the barely concealed stereotype of greedy Jewish businesspeople implied by Elizondo’s remark that “If for no other reason than commerce, the Jews were friendly and accommodating to non-Jews.”⁴⁸

As for Jesus, Elizondo contends:

The practices and teachings of Jesus struck a heavy blow at the fundamental convictions of the Jewish people of the time. He appeared to prostitute everything that the Jewish establishment had come to hold as sacred and that had become the basis for the survival and salvation of the people. Jewish authorities had worked hard to keep the community whole and pure. Now, in the name of the same God and kingdom, the unauthorized Galilean was challenging the very basis of the theological edifice that crowned their theocratic endeavors.⁴⁹

Elsewhere in *Galilean Journey*, Elizondo himself arrives at an important insight: “White Western supremacy permeates our way of life to such a degree that even good persons act in racist ways without even realizing that they are being racist...[.] Racism and ethnocentrism are interwoven in literature, entertainment, institutions, marriage relations, finances, and even religious symbolism.”⁵⁰ To this list we must sadly add biblical and theological scholarship as well. At the heart of Elizondo’s inadvertent anti-Judaism is his uncritical embrace of Western European exegetical discourses that were themselves irreparably racialized. This has been demonstrated convincingly in

⁴⁷ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 69.

⁴⁸ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 51.

⁴⁹ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 71.

⁵⁰ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 111.

Shawn Kelley's important new book, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship*, which explores the ways in which racism and racialized discourses played key roles in the development of biblical scholarship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵¹

A look at Elizondo's bibliography is instructive, for it includes Ernst Lohmeyer's 1936 work *Galiläa und Jerusalem*.⁵² In that work, Susannah Heschel explains, Lohmeyer "developed the theory of a two-site origin of early Christianity: Galilee, where a universalistic, son-of-man eschatology prevailed, and Jerusalem, dominated by nationalistic, Jewish eschatology."⁵³

In Lohmeyer's two-site theory of Christian origins – the Galilee with its universalistic son-of-man eschatology, Jerusalem with its nationalistic, Jewish eschatology – we find the roots of Elizondo's 'Galilee' and 'Jerusalem' principles

Here then, are the twisted roots of Elizondo's "Galilee principle" and his "Jerusalem principle." Four years after Lohmeyer's book appeared, Walter Grundmann suggested in *Jesus der Galiläer und das Judentum*⁵⁴ "that Jesus' rejection of the Jewish title of 'messiah' in favor of the title 'Son of man' proved his Galilean, and thus his Aryan, origin."⁵⁵ If it is true that *Galilean Journey* laid the foundation for

⁵¹ Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge, 2002). Also see Susannah Heschel, "When Jesus Was an Aryan: The Protestant Church and Antisemitic Propaganda," in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, ed. Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 68-89; as well as Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁵² Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1936.

⁵³ Heschel, "When Jesus Was an Aryan," 78-79.

⁵⁴ (Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1940).

⁵⁵ Heschel, "When Jesus Was an Aryan," 78.

Hispanic theology in the United States, and if the U.S. Hispanic theologians who are indebted to Elizondo truly share his genuinely liberationist vision, then it is high time that we take a closer and more careful look at its hidden assumptions and at the unexamined implications of its discourse about *mestizaje*.

Summing Up

For the purposes of this study, the example of Elizondo's use of biblical scholarship in *Galilean Journey* clearly demonstrates that there is more to the give-and-take between biblical scholars and practitioners of other theological disciplines than the Pontifical Biblical Commission suggested in saying:

On the one hand, systematic theology has an influence upon the presuppositions with which exegetes approach biblical texts. On the other hand, exegesis provides the other theological disciplines with data fundamental for their operation. There is, accordingly, a relationship of dialogue between exegesis and the other branches of theology, granted always a mutual respect for that which is specific to each.⁵⁶

For better and for worse, both intentionally and unintentionally, exegetes bring more than data to the table for the consideration of the "other theological disciplines," and that fact so complicates the rules of engagement between biblical studies and theological scholarship that it leads one to wonder whether good fences do indeed make for good neighbors. Exegesis has never been just *exegesis* pure and simple. Looking across the disciplinary divide with suspicion in the light of what we have learned, systematic theologians might well be tempted to part company with exegetes and to regard the increasing distance between themselves and biblical scholarship as a matter salutary insulation, and to applaud the AAR's "historic decision" as the only way out of an impossible situation. I would venture to disagree. While the increasing inter- and intradisciplinary specialization is surely here to stay, good fences make for good neighbors

⁵⁶*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, in Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document*, 161

only when well-maintained gates grant easy access of each to the other side. Responsible biblical scholarship and responsible theological research call for — and call each other to — transparency and accountability.⁵⁷ Rather than accepting at face-value — and often at second or third hand — the claims of biblical scholarship, systematic theologians who turn to the Bible as the “soul of theology” would do well to bear in mind the contextuality of all discourses as they read the discourses of biblical scholarship with a measure of care and caution. For their part, biblical scholars would do well to call systematic theologians to be operate within the framework of what Fernando Segovia has called a hermeneutics of otherness and engagement as a prolegomenon to reading with (or alongside, or even against) exegetes and other readers (academic, pastoral, professional and otherwise) of biblical texts.⁵⁸

If the U.S. Hispanic practice of *teología de conjunto* is to be more than an empty aspiration, then the conversations in which we participate among ourselves must be as frank and candid as they are civil and respectful. If by *teología de conjunto* we understand a paradigm of theological discourse that rejects the competing academic models

⁵⁷This must be the case if, in the words of *Dei Verbum*, Scripture is to be understood as the soul of theology (*Dei Verbum* 24). See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Scripture: The Soul of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994).

⁵⁸For Segovia, the hermeneutics of otherness and engagement suggests that “First, the text is to be regarded as a socially and culturally conditioned other. The question of access is crucial. Rather than positing any type of direct or immediate entrance into the text, the hermeneutics of otherness and engagement argues for distantiating from it as a working desideratum, emphasizing thereby the historical and cultural remoteness of the text [...] Second, the reader is also to be regarded as socially and culturally conditioned, as an other to both text and other readers. The question of critical honesty is crucial. Rather than seeking after impartiality or objectivity, presuming to universality, and claiming to read like anyone or everyone, the hermeneutics of otherness and engagement argues for a self-conscious exposition and analysis of the reader’s strategy for reading, the rhetorical foundations behind this strategy, and the social location underlying such a strategy” (“Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora: A Hermeneutics of Otherness and Engagement,” in *Reading from this Place*. Volume 1, 68-69). I would submit that a judicious exercise of the hermeneutics of otherness and engagement might well serve to prevent the sort of precipitous efforts to affirm the linear correspondence of first century texts with twenty-first century contexts that is characteristic of some Latin American liberationist readers and some of their U.S. Hispanic heirs.

of debates as zero-sum games, then constructive self-critical discourse makes us all winners—even those with whom we must disagree. If, as U.S. Hispanic Catholic biblical scholars and theologians, ours is an ecclesial vocation—and it surely is—then the Scriptures themselves provide common ground for our committed discourses, for in them the Church finds sustenance: “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she [*sic*] venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God’s word and of Christ’s body” (*Dei Verbum* 21).⁵⁹

⁵⁹On scripture and sacrament, see Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd edition (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999).