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Hermeneutics and Biblical Interpretation

XI. Inspiration and Incarnation: The Christological analogy and the hermeneutic of Faith. A closer look at the hermeneutic of faith with Mary Healy. “Holy Scripture, in its way of speaking, transcends all other sciences because in one and the same statement while it narrates an event it sets forth mystery”—Gregory the Great. And for this reason, the greatest act of communication ought to be the silent humble gesture before mystery.

1. The Incarnation and the Sacramentality of Scripture: “We must go to Scripture as to the flesh of Christ”—St. Ignatius of Antioch. Christ is fully human, like us in all things but sin, so Scripture is fully human, composed by human agents within the limitations of their historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts and exercising the full powers of their intelligence and freedom. At the same time, as Christ is fully divine, so Scripture is truly the Word of God and expresses the revelations of God in all its fullness.
 - a. Scripture is itself a sacrament, a visible sign that both signifies and makes present the invisible divine mystery.
 - b. For Von Balthasar, Christ is both exegete and exegesis. He interprets himself in his deeds, which are incarnate words. Thus, every movement of history is being transformed by the spirit. To understand Christ, is to understand how to interpret the biblical text.
 - c. CCC, 515
2. Scriptures spiritual sense and the language of fulfillment. Jesus Christ is the definitive revelation and fulfillment of all that is contained in the Hebrew Scriptures—that both the OT and NT lead us into the mystery of the Son of God made man. The spiritual sense is not an additional meaning, but a meaning in light of the spiritual interpretation. In the words of DeLubac: “*The literal sense is pregnant with eternal value*”. According to Paul, the promise/fulfillment structure...the OC/NC order...is about the Letter and Spirit, and for Von Balthasar, the transcendence of the spirit over the letter forms the central point of Christianity and remains continuously present over time. This transcendence provides for us the key that unlocks all interpretation.
 - a. Lk.4:16-30. Consult Word of the Week on **Fulfillment**. Luke records where Isaiah picks up the language of Lev.25 regarding the jubilee year. It was part of Israel’s economic legislation; a jubilee was celebrated every 50 years. It signaled the cancellation of debts and required property and slaves to be returned to the original family owners. Isaiah Projects this jubilee celebration into the future when God will come to release Israel from its slavery (idols) and debt (guilt). Jesus follows the spirit of Is. When he announces liberation from sin!
 - i. Although the history of Israel was already objectively saturated with Christological significance, the events of Christ themselves could never have been directly articulated before they actually took place. In retrospect, through the spiritual sense, we can see the marvelous tapestry that is the beauty of the inner drama of the OT corresponding wonderfully with the NT. Interpretation must always have the vantage point of the whole of history where God works with causality.
 1. For further reflection, DeLubac states “*Christianity has transformed the ancient world by absorbing it into itself...These roots are all the more necessary as the transcendence is more elevated.*”
 - b. The fulfillment motif is also seen in Matthew as he regularly points to how all of the events narrated in the OT and prophecy, is also a revelation of Christ the Incarnate Word. This is seen in Christ as the new Solomon, Jacob, Moses, etc...Moreover, this revelation points us into the mystery of divine sonship and our call to witness the Truth of Christ.
 - c. John also, as spoken of before in previous outlines, uses things familiar to explain things unfamiliar. His gospel is the most sophisticated of all the gospels as he

- reaches deep into the celebration of Jewish feasts and its very detailed picture of Jewish life.
- d. Paul quotes the OT over 800 times. Again, Paul's OT scholarship pervades all of his teaching as he beautifully weaves the Promise/structure fulfillment into view...consider the example of law and relationship.
 - e. The bookends of Christ's life effect a real change in Scripture. In the language of the ancients: "the Lord Jesus took the loaves of Scripture in his hands, and in the very act of offering up his life he consecrates the Word of God"
3. The mystical component of Exegesis. As Gregory the Great once noted: "*Just as the Spirit of Life touches the mind of the prophet, he also touches the mind of the speaker. The Word of God is a divine act of communication and it therefore must be understood in light of the intent of the speaker.*"
 - a. 1 Cor.2:11-13: "*No one comprehends the divine realities except the Spirit of God. Now we have received...the Spirit from God, which we might understand what has been given to us by God. And we impart this in the words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual realities to those who are spiritual*".
 1. DeLubac argues that Scripture can never be purely an objective science, because our spiritual understanding of the text is somewhat hinged upon our personal conversion, our newness of life—the New Man sees the text in a new way! Based upon this truth, we can never exhaust the inexhaustible mystery of Scripture. In the words of DeLubac, "it escapes us to the extent that we think we possess it"
 - b. The tendency to reject this truth comes out of a disproportionate understanding of who Christ is in light of Faith and Reason...read from text, pg. 41.

XII. The Temptation of Jesus: "*The gospels speak of a time of solitude for Jesus in the desert immediately after his baptism by John. Driven by the Spirit into the desert, Jesus remains there for forty days without eating; he lives among the wild beasts, and angels who minister to him. At the end of his time, Satan tempts him three times, seeking to compromise his filial attitude toward God. Jesus rebuffs these attacks, which recapitulates the temptation of Adam in Paradise and of Israel in the Desert, and the devil leaves him 'until an opportune time'*" (CCC, 538)

1. Mt.4:1-11: Matthew's temptation narrative recounts Jesus' spiritual preparation for ministry. The events contrast the disobedience of ancient Israel with the obedience of Christ.
 - a. Israel and Jesus are both called God's son (Mt.3:17; Ex.4:22); Each temptation is preceded by a baptism (Mt.3:13-17; 1 Cor. 10-15; Israel was tested for forty years as Jesus was tested for forty days and nights (Mt.4:2); Israel failed in its wilderness testing as Jesus triumphs over Satan and self-abasement (Mt.4:11).
 - A. The number 40 is seen as a probationary period in Scripture. Consider the context to which we see the number 40: The Flood (Gn.7:4, 27); Moses fast on Sinai (Ex.34:28); Israel's journey in the desert (Deut.8:2); The twelve spies inspection of Canaan (Num14:34); Israel's oppression of the Philistines (Judges 13:1); Elijah's fasting (1 Kings 19:8); and the ninevites opportunity to repent at the hands of Jonah (Jonah:3:4).
 - b. St. John Chrysostom draws on the moral sense to articulate how Jesus' victory sets the example for Christian obedience. Triumph of our temptation in the wilderness of the earthly desert through sacrifice and obedience to God's word. The food of life is God's will!
2. Overarching Temptation: Satan tests the identity of Christ's sonship "If you are the Son of God" (Mt.4:3, 6; Lk.4:3, 9). This temptation is highlighted by trying to avert his attention to an earthly/political mission of sensationalism and power opposed to his mission to suffer and die at the hands of the people.
 - a. This is later highlighted by Christ's rebuking of Peter who is called "Satan" for trying to avert his attention from his mission (Mt.16:21-23). A rebuttal that can only be understood in light of the temptation narrative: "Don't go there" is essentially

saying do not talk about that thing (abortion/contraception/active homosexuality), which will lead to unfavorable opinions about you.

A. In Luke's account, The Temptation narrative ends with these words: "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Lk.4:13). Certainly, Satan's aggressive assault would be remounted in the Passion narrative. Even the language "if you are the Son of God" reappears in the crucifixion (Mt.27:40).

1. Phil.2:6:11 is the hymn of sonship, which ought to reign in our hearts!

B. Matthew and Luke point out that Satan's final effort to tempt Christ from his Mission of sonship leads them to Jerusalem, "and set him on the pinnacle of the Temple" (Mt.4:5; Lk.4:9), ironically the place that Christ would overcome Satan in the victory of the cross.

b. In Matthew's narrative (as well as Luke) we read of Satan quoting Scripture. What is important to note here is Satan's misconstruing and twisting of the text to support his own agenda against Christ's religious sensitivity towards interpreting the text in light of the whole picture. There is the hermeneutic of continuity.

3. Mark's Account is abridged, but is worth highlighting for several reasons: The first being that Mark makes a point to emphasize that Christ was with the "wild beasts" in his temptation. This certainly is an allusion to the Garden of Eden and brings us back to the events of Genesis and the work of the beast (interestingly, the Greek *Therion* is only seen a few times up until the Book of Revelation where you have it up to thirty times...this Greek term can also mean venomous, bestial savage).

a. That being said, Mark also speaks of the wilderness, which as PBXI reminds us, (JN, 27) is the opposite image to that of a garden. Reconciliation and healing comes full circle once Christ passes through the desert and the garden to reclaim the crown of victory over death. From construction, to deconstruction to reconstruction.