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Implementing the Post-Second Vatican Council's Vision for Evangelization in the United States: The Challenges Posed by a Polarized Church

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Abstract

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By Israel Díaz

The Second Vatican Council's recovery of the Catholic Church's commitment to its missionary vocation towards the world places upon the succeeding generations of Roman Catholics the responsibility to implement this vision. The vision exhorts the Catholic faithful to identify with the marginalized and to transform unjust structures by means of the renewal of the individual who is reconciled with God and others in Christ. However, the implementation of the Second Vatican Council's vision for evangelization is hindered by ideological differences which have severed the interdependence between the transformation of the individual and of dehumanizing structures called for by the council's vision. The cause of this disjunction lays in the theological crisis precipitated by the twentieth century theological shift that embraced historical consciousness, and in particular modern forms of biblical interpretation. The aim of this thesis is to determine a model for biblical interpretation that, by reconciling this division, can assist in the application of the total Second Vatican Council's vision of evangelization.

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Introduction: The Call for a New Vision

The recovery of the Roman Catholic Church's vision for evangelization in the late twentieth century began with the Second Vatican Council (1963–1965). In contrast to the First Vatican Council (1869), which used the term gospel only once, the Second Vatican Council mentioned the term gospel 157 times, evangelization 31 times, and evangelize 18 times.[1] In *Gaudium et Spes*, the "joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted" are the "joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."[2] *Ad Gentes*, the decree on the missionary activity of the church, calls the Church to "save and renew every creature" so that "all things may be restored in Christ".[3] *Lumen Gentium* speaks of the Church's desire, as a sacrament of Christ, to "proclaim the Gospel to every creature" in bringing Christ to all.[4] In sum, the Second Vatican Council turned the attention of the Church to its missionary vocation towards the world, a vocation expressed in the post-Vatican II vision for evangelization.

This turn is characterized by the Roman Catholic Church's awareness that the new historical context — that of the modern world — necessitates that the Church's proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ be effective and relevant. The turn called for the Church to identify itself with the affliction of the marginalized and to strive for the

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[1] Thomas P. Rausch, "Introduction," in *Evangelizing America*, ed. Thomas P. Rausch (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 3.

[2] Second Vatican Council, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gadium Et Spes*, 1965)," available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, accessed on 3 March 2012, no. 1.

[3] Second Vatican Council, "Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes*, 1965)," available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html, accessed on 3 March 2012, no.1.

[4] Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 1964)," available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, accessed on 3 March 2012, no. 1.

transformation of dehumanizing structures that inflict such plight, a transformation that is grounded in the salvation and renewal of every creature restored in Christ. This interdependence between the transformation of the individual and the transformation of unjust structures is the key for the Church's vision of evangelization to be effective and relevant. The proclamation is made relevant in so far as it is centered on the transformation of the practical realities of quotidian life. The proclamation is effective to the degree that it recognizes that the transformation of structures calls on the transformation of the individual. Consequently, these components constitute the Church's vision for evangelization and are pivotal in the proclamation of the Gospel in the modern world.

Regrettably, the implementation of the Second Vatican Council's vision for evangelization is hindered by ideological differences which have severed the interdependence between the transformation of the individual and of dehumanizing structures.[5] The cause of this disjunction lays in the theological crisis precipitated by the twentieth century theological shift that embraced historical consciousness, and in particular modern forms of biblical interpretation. Hence at the core of this dichotomy is the debate over hermeneutical approaches to reading the Bible which shape the approach taken to implement the Church's call for evangelization. To illustrate, this thesis will rely on Max Weber's understanding of an "ideal-type" in employing the typologies of the Catholic Right and the Catholic Left as heuristic tools derived from the experience of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States.[6] These typologies reflect the dichotomy as

[5] Allan F. Deck, "Evangelization as Conceptual Framework for the Church's Mission: The Case of U.S. Hispanics," in *Evangelizing America*, ed. Thomas P. Rausch (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 90.

[6] Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 155–156. Pals explains that Weber's ideal-type "furnishes a conceptual framework into which all cases can

the Catholic Right and Catholic Left respectively embrace one of the two pillars of evangelization: (1) the evangelization of culture and (2) the transformation of structures, or social justice.[7] However, by not implementing the Church's holistic vision for evangelization, these approaches hampered evangelization by placing burdens on the Catholic faithful and by failing to engage in a dialogue with the post-modern world that remains faithful to the Christian tradition. [8]

At the core of this dichotomy between the evangelization of culture (the Catholic Right) and the transformation of structures (the Catholic Left) is the debate over hermeneutical approaches to interpreting the Bible. The aim of this thesis is to determine a model for biblical interpretation that, by reconciling this division, can assist in the application of the total Second Vatican Council's vision of evangelization. The thesis will first present the post-Vatican II plan for evangelization and illustrate how ideological differences have hindered its implementation, especially the way in which biblical interpretation has contributed to the vision's appropriation and implementation by the Catholic Right and the Catholic Left. The thesis will then elaborate on the theological crisis fuelling this division by briefly tracing the development of the theological shift from a neoscholastic model to one of historical consciousness in the twentieth century, its culmination in the Second Vatican Council, in particular the Dogmatic Constitution on

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be brought for analysis." This allows for a comparison of types, the tracing of changes, and the making of inferences about cause and effect though no real-world ideal-type may possess all of the characteristics. The typologies of the Catholic Right and Catholic Left thus do not stand for all types of Catholic movements of evangelization. But for the purposes of this thesis they are representative of various prominent positions of Catholic groups in the United States. These typologies are in part informed by my 20 years of experience in Catholic pastoral ministry in parishes and 13 years of experience teaching in Catholic high schools.

[7] Allan Figueroa Deck, *The Second Wave: Hispanic Ministry and the Evangelization of Cultures* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 93.

[8] Thomas P. Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason: Apologists, Evangelists, and Theologians in a Divided Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 52.

Divine Revelation, and assess the implications of this shift on Catholic theology, and thus on evangelization. The thesis will then propose a viable model for biblical interpretation and follow with an application of this model to Matthew 11:25–30 and a summary of its findings. The thesis will conclude by considering the insight these findings bring to the task of bridging the dichotomy between the Catholic Right and the Catholic Left in the matter of Roman Catholic evangelization.

Roman Catholic Evangelization in the Post-Vatican II Era

In his 1975 encyclical, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI elaborated on the character of the Church's missionary vocation. At its outset the encyclical identifies the effort to "proclaim the Gospel" as a "service rendered to the Christian community and the whole world" in response to the people of today who are oppressed by fear, distress, confusion, and uncertainty.[9] It is a proclamation consisting of two fundamental commands: "Put on the new self" and "Be reconciled with God."[10] In this manner the proclamation of the Gospel is the remedy for society's burdened condition. Therefore the task of evangelization is to lighten the burden of the human community through renewal and reconciliation. In other words, the burdens are made light by making the reign of God present.

To make the reign of God present, Paul VI emphasized the importance of evangelizing both individuals and cultures as the aim of evangelization is to bring "the Good News into all the strata of humanity."[11] The task envisions the transformation of

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[9] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html, accessed on 6 March 2012, no. 1 and 2.

[10] Ibid., no, 2.

[11] Ibid., no, 18.

humanity via individual persons, renewed by baptism, committed to living according to the Gospel, and by this means, to transform society. Thus Paul VI writes,

> The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.[12]

Paul VI goes on to suggest that the conversion of the personal and collective consciences is to affect people's "criteria for judgment, determining values, points of interests, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life" in evangelizing "man's culture and cultures."[13] This transformation of culture, he further stressed, involves human rights, family life, peace, justice, development, and liberation.[14] Therefore, the evangelization of individuals and cultures consists of a correlation between evangelization, personal transformation, and social justice that impacts all levels of society.

His successor, Pope John Paul II, built on this development in 1991 with his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* and again in 1999 with *Ecclesia in America*. In these encyclicals John Paul II reaffirmed the correlation between the church's mission, personal transformation, and social justice, and expanded on the church's understanding of evangelization by calling for a "new evangelization". This call for new evangelization provided four characteristics: (1) the participation of the laity, not just clergy and religious, in the task of evangelization, (2) a concern for those who have lost a living sense of the faith, (3) the need to evangelize individuals and cultures, and (4) envisioning the Christian life as a lifelong process of "deepening the life of faith that includes

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., no. 19 and 20.
[14] Rausch, 3.

catechetical teaching, moral doctrine, and social teaching of the church".[15] John Paul II also proposed that the fundamental task of the Church's mission be its vision for evangelization.[16]

The post-Vatican II vision considers evangelization to be "a process of ongoing conversion by which the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed" and consists of three components: 1) inculturation, 2) liberation, and 3) ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.[17] The vision for the evangelization of individuals and cultures is summed up in one word, inculturation. Inculturation is "the appeal that the gospel makes to core values and meaning at the heart of a person's and an entire people's way of life."[18] It is an appeal which begins in the human hearts of individuals but needs to radiate towards the family, community, and the culture itself, and which connotes an affective dimension of the Gospel. Furthermore, inculturation consists of an ongoing dialogue between the Gospel and the culture in seeking to transform the community's values, way of thinking, and acting.[19] This dialogue between the Gospel and culture is one of mutual influence. The Gospel transforms culture, but the culture provides the symbols with which to convey the Gospel. This mutual exchange allows for the proclamation of the Gospel to be carried out in a culturally relevant way as it calls for an identification of the cultural and religious symbols which are viable to live and promote the Gospel. This approach promotes respect for peoples' traditions and encourages a welcoming milieu of mutual respect and equality among cultures, in particularly those who share the same faith.

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[15] Ibid., 4.
[16] Deck, "Evangelization as Conceptual Framework", 56.
[17] Ibid., 94.
[18] See Allan F. Deck, "A Latino Practical Theology: Mapping the Road Ahead," *Journal of Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 293, quoting John Coleman, "Pastoral Strategies for Multicultural Parishes," *Origins* 31 (January 10, 2002): 283.
[19] Deck, "Evangelization as Conceptual Framework", 94.

Such interdependence between the individual's conversion and that of the community calls for an awareness that the conversion process needs to affect the social, economic, and political order.[20] Therefore evangelization includes a liberation component. Liberation is a living out of the Gospel's proclamation of loving God and neighbor as it makes the reign of God present in a concrete form where liberation from sin and all its concrete, personal, structural, and systemic effects takes place.[21] It empowers the people to be aware of their plight and to act on behalf of their own justice.[22] In this sense, the members of the community become their own agents of individual and social changes as their transformation flows from a heart that is centered on Jesus Christ's reign of justice.

Lastly, since the Gospel is about the universal love and presence of God in all persons, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is fundamental.[23] It is a dialogue marked by mutuality, respect, and solidarity that is rooted in human dignity. This dialogue allows for Christians to learn about themselves and about others while reflecting on the ways which God is present in other people and cultures.

In short, Catholicism understands that evangelization consists of a verbal proclamation that leads to personal faith and culminates in social justice and liberation. Therefore, "it is a proclamation that only reaches full development when it is listened to,

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 95.

[22] See Deck, *The Second Wave*, 125–127. Here Deck presents Paulo Freire's vision of the pedagogy of the poor where he speaks of the conscientization of the poor. This conscientization is defined as "the promotion of the process by which people . . . opened their eyes to the reality around them and entered into a course of action calculated to overcome the dehumanizing situations in which they found themselves."

[23] See Deck, "Evangelization as Conceptual Framework," 94.

accepted, assimilated," and arouses a genuine adherence to the truths revealed by Jesus Christ and expressed "concretely in a visible entry into a community of believers".[24]

Unfortunately, the Second Vatican Council's efforts to renew evangelization have been hindered by ideological differences.[25] Distinct perspectives on christological, soteriological, and ecclesiological issues divide Roman Catholics into groups. While largely in agreement on Christian doctrines, they disagree on the manner in which these doctrines are to be interpreted and hence how these Christian teachings should shape the self-understanding and evangelizing approach of an ecclesial community. It is in this context that the dichotomy between the Catholic Right and the Catholic Left is to be understood as these groups employ portions of the church's vision for evangelization while discarding others. The Catholic Right, with its emphasis on the individual, embraces the Catholic Church's vision of inculturation.[26] They center on the transformation of personal values, feelings, costumes, and thoughts via prayer, spirituality, moral development, and personal ethics. In contrast, the Catholic Left embraces the Catholic Church's call to transform the social order to achieve a just society; hence their socio-political commitment and action for justice.[27] Clearly the Roman Catholic vision of evangelization respects and promotes the concerns of these two missiological approaches. But while standing with in the tradition, the discord over the methods for interpreting Christian doctrine and of a community's self-definition leads to the rejection of a dimension of the Church's vision for evangelization.[28] The outcome of such approach is tragic. Like the yoke of the Pharisees, these divergent poles "tie up

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[24] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 23.
[25] Deck, "Evangelization as Conceptual Framework," 90.
[26] Ibid., 93.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

heavy burdens [hard to carry] and lay them on people's shoulders" and they "neglect the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity."[29] They promote a framework for evangelization and Christian living which burdens the people they seek to liberate by promoting pieces of the Church's plan for evangelization instead of the vision as a whole.

Outcomes of the distinct approaches to doctrinal interpretation and self-understanding can be seen in ecclesiological, christological, and soteriological disputes. The Catholic Right, as exemplified by the New Apologists, represents "a Catholic type of fundamentalism."[30] "Many exhibit a fundamentalist understanding of teaching, one that fails to note the historical context of a doctrinal statement, its degree of authority, and the possibility of doctrinal development or even changes."[31] Consequently, the Catholic Right holds that revelation is direct and in no need of interpretation. Furthermore, the Pope, as the vicar of Christ, is a vehicle of this direct revelation; hence the "magisterial maximalism which sees all questions in the contemporary Church as resolvable simply by appealing to the papal magisterium."[32]

Given this divine authority vested upon the ecclesial leadership, the Catholic Right prides itself in its loyalty and unquestionable submission to the magisterium. For instance, Karl Keating, in his book *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, "argues repeatedly that no pope has ever contradicted the teaching of an earlier pope and no ecumenical council has ever contradicted the teaching of an earlier council on faith or morals."[33]

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[29] Matthew 23:4, 23. Unless noted, all scriptural references are taken from the NAB (New American Bible).

[30] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 42.

[31] Ibid., 43.

[32] Ibid., 5.

[33] Ibid., 45.

In its christology, the Catholic Right's methodology starts from the doctrine of the Church and places an emphasis on the divinity of Jesus. As such its focus rests on Jesus' salvific work attained through his crucifixion and resurrection. This places an emphasis on the conversion of the individual person so that he or she may live in union with God as they live a life of personal moral rectitude and piety. The moral rectitude desired tends to concentrate on sexual ethics and end of life issues — chastity, abstinence, contraception, and abortion — while piety centers on the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist and a devotion to the Blessed Mother, in particular her power of intercession and revelations.[34] This outlook by the Catholic Right consists of a strong sacramental life, deep commitment to communal and personal prayer, personal transformation, dedication to studying the Church's teaching, and a personal relationship to God in Jesus. It also offers a strong sense of Catholic identity, one which offers a clear sense of distinction from others.[35]

In contrast, the Catholic Left recognizes that "all our language about God is culturally conditioned" and therefore understands revelation be contextual and in need of interpretation.[36] Furthermore, in view of this recognition and of the possibility offered by canon law to allow the Synod of Bishops the power to exercise a deliberative rather than consultative vote (can. 343), the Catholic Left locates the teaching and interpretive authority of the Church on the collegiality of the councils and not on the Pope and the curia.[37] Its christology is from below and as such "takes much more seriously the historical Jesus, his life, and ministry, the resurrection, and the development of the gospel

[34] Ibid., 5.
[35] Rausch, *Evangelizing America*, 7.
[36] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 21.
[37] Ibid., 29.

tradition."[38] However, "some are more engaged in a speculative reconstruction which pays little attention to the faith of the Church."[39] For example, in searching for the real Jesus behind the Gospels and the dogma of the Church, the Jesus Seminar rejects the Christ of Christian faith in favor of a secular, non-eschatological Jesus.[40] Of particular mention is John Dominic Crossan, a member of the Jesus Seminar and a Catholic New Testament scholar, who presents Jesus as a Jewish Cynic philosopher and magician whose sayings advocate a radical egalitarianism that challenged the established structures of hierarchical power.[41] With this in mind, the Catholic Left is open to the Church's teaching of social justice and considers God's plan of salvation is to make the reign of God present in the world by transforming the dehumanizing socio-political and economic structures.[42] In this approach it is the proclamation of the earthly Jesus, in particular the beatitudes and his discourse in Matt 25:31–46, along with his ministry to the poor and marginalized which serve as the crux of Christian faith and moral living. Lastly, the Catholic Left places a strong value on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as it searches for common ideas, goals, and ways of life among other Christian denominations and world religions. This outlook impels the listener to act on behalf of the oppressed, promotes much needed respect among cultures and religious traditions, and speaks to practical quotidian realities. However, these actions at times come at the expense of what is unique to each tradition. For instance, Jesus' divinity and uniqueness are inconsequential as "some theologians, committed to interreligious dialogue, argue that Christian theology should move to an acceptance of genuine pluralism by renouncing its

[38] Ibid., 23.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 25.
[41] Ibid., 26.
[42] Rausch, *Evangelizing America*, 7.

doctrine that salvation is through Christ alone."[43] The result may be an identity grounded on religious syncretism and secular humanism as much as on Christian tradition.

The preceding comparison is a heuristic generalization of the Catholic Right and Catholic Left which illustrates two diverse approaches in Roman Catholicism to carry out the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is important to note that both approaches ground their ideologies and missiological approaches on Catholic tradition. Moreover, each reflects an aspect of the Catholic vision for evangelization that is worth noting, the need for personal conversion (inculturation) and the need to transform inhumane socio-political and economic structures (liberation). The limitations of each position are two-fold. The first is the failure to see the faithfulness to the tradition the approach of the other offers to making the reign of God present and to realize the value each approach brings to the Church's evangelization efforts. The second limitation is the lack of a self-assessment of their respective pastoral plans. Consequently, each fails to perceive how its approach falls short of living up to the post Second Vatican Council's vision for evangelization, a failure compounded by the Catholic Right's and Catholic Left's hermeneutical approach to reading the bible. This failure culminates in the distortion of the Gospel and promotes a framework for evangelization and Christian living which burdens the people it aspires to help.

The Catholic Right burdens its members through its uncritical interpretation of doctrines, the bible, and submission to ecclesial authority. For them, a literalist reading of the Bible serves as the system of classification for interpreting human experience and

[43] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 24.

the modern world.[44] This hermeneutical method calls on the faithful to embrace a pre-critical notion of God and the world, a conceptual framework that stands in contrast to the lived experience of modernity. First, a literalist reading of the Bible depicts women as second class citizens of society, some calling on women to be submissive to their husbands who are the head of the household. Second, it serves to uphold the belief that God operates exclusively through Jesus who is the incarnation of the pre-existent divine Logos. However, despite their recognition of the pre-existence of the divine Logos, they limit the actions of the divine Logos to the historical figure of Jesus. This limitation of the Logos' divine action to operate only through Jesus, and through the Roman Catholic magisterium to which Jesus bestowed his authority, provokes a triumphalist arrogance which looks down upon other Christian denominations, religious traditions, and non-Christian cultures. Lastly, in taking the Bible's cosmogony literally, the Christian Right still speaks of heaven and hell as literal places versus states of existence. These viewpoints are difficult for a critical person to maintain. Hence the believer either denies these beliefs and stands socially excommunicated from the religious community or embraces the beliefs and stands as an outcast of society by embracing the status quo and failing to speak for justice in the world, e.g. women's rights and multicultural respect and dialogue. It is an approach that fails to dialogue with modernity.

The Catholic Right also holds a myopic moral lens aimed at human sexuality. Grounded on a literalist reading of 1 Corinthians 7:1–9, human sexuality is considered as an accommodation to what should be the optimal state of spiritual life, celibacy. Human sexuality is tolerated only because of the human inability for self-control and thus the

[44] A literalist reading arrives at a meaning of the text by taking the text at face value. This kind of reading stands in contrast to arriving at a literal meaning, or literal sense, of the text by attending to the text's original context, the authorial intent, intended audience, etc.

purpose of sexual intercourse among married couples is to avoid sexual immorality (1 Cor 7:2). This mindset maintains the perception that monasticism, with its contemplative and celibate commitments, is the model for Christian life, including for married couples. Christians who are unable to hold this view are considered to be spirituality immature and cannot live the fullness of the Christian vocation as Jesus, as well as Mary, lived celibate lives. Interestingly enough, this literalist interpretation does not take into account the command in Genesis 1:28 and 9:1 to "be fertile and multiply" and the celebration of sexual union in the Song of Songs.

The Catholic Right's uncritical submission to ecclesial authority trumps the Christian tradition of the sense of the faithful. This sadly silences the prophetic voice of the laity to speak on matters regarding the life of the Church. Moreover, it is a standpoint that unnecessarily frustrates the loyalties and commitments of the faithful who may be torn between the proclamation of the Gospel and the human frailty of the ecclesial authority. One only needs to look at the past and present history of the Catholic Church to see where a person with a Christian ethic and a critical mind can wonder about the choices made by the ecclesial leadership, from Pope Pius X's rejection of the modernist interpretation of Catholic doctrine to the current sex abuse scandal. This does not suggest that one reject ecclesial authority, but uncritical submission is not a viable option either.

While the Catholic Right burdens its community through its uncritical interpretation of doctrines, scripture, and submission to ecclesial authority, the Catholic Left encumbers its members by dismissing their religious experience and contributing to a loss of Catholic identity. Recognizing the contribution of human authors in conveying God's revelation in sacred scripture, and given the limitations of human language and the

impact of the socio-historical context on language and thought, the Catholic Left properly regards the Bible as shaped by the patriarchal and political world of the first century Greco-Roman world. However, it believes that these influences, along with the religious experience of the biblical authors, distort the true message of Jesus and his portrayal in the books of the New Testament, especially the canonical gospels. This calls for a methodology which deconstructs the biblical documents, along with the Christian tradition, in order to arrive at the true, undistorted, message of Jesus. In other words, the task of biblical scholarship is to arrive at the historical Jesus, a Jesus who is untouched by the experience and interpretation of the nascent Christian communities' experience of the Risen Christ. In this method the New Testament serves only as a historical source. Any material that does not contribute to the quest for the historical Jesus is discarded, and with it the authorial intent and the biblical texts' soteriological and eschatological outlooks as these taint the proclamation of the historical Jesus. It is a method that, in dissecting the biblical passages, studies the pericopes divorced from their literary context and looks down upon religious experience as a viable epistemological source.

This search for the historical Jesus, while striving for the liberation of the oppressed and the marginalized, also burdens its members as they find themselves at the threshold of losing their Catholic identity. Their christology, while placing an emphasis on the historical Jesus, relativizes the divinity of Jesus to the point where it is no longer necessary. In this approach Jesus best functions as a moral teacher, prophet, or guru. Given this function of Jesus' salvific work there is no room for the crucifixion and the resurrection. What matters is that a person is living in an ethical manner that promotes justice in society. This emphasis minimizes or even discards the role of personal sin and

of conversion as a means to transform unjust social structures. By surrendering critical aspects of Christian doctrine, what remains is a religious movement that is no different than any other social reform movement. Moreover, it can be suggested that what remains is a progressive or socialist agenda that expresses its ideology by employing and reinterpreting Christian symbols. It should be noted that as this Christian ideological narrative is easily interchangeable with any other, it leaves the believer wondering what is the point of being a Christian, with its rites and sacraments. What is the value of the death and resurrection of Jesus if all that matters for salvation is following an ethical teaching, a teaching that is no different than any other? From a Christian perspective, this frame of thought provides a false sense of spiritual security by claiming that one is in right relationship with God by acting in ways that promote social justice while ignoring one's personal moral condition.

The above appraisal of the dichotomy between the Catholic Right and Catholic Left on implementing the vision for evangelization illustrates the burdens this dichotomy brings to the Roman Catholic community. First, this division hinders evangelization efforts because there is no common agreement on what evangelization entails.[45] In this lack of agreement both "fail to respect the proper balance which *Evangelii Nuntiandi* maintains between personal conversion and social transformation of structures."[46] On one hand, the emphasis on the personal and cultural conversion obscures the collective aspect of sin and privatizes the gospel.[47] On the other hand, "an emphasis on social justice or structural transformation can contribute to the confusing of faith with ideology and the manipulation of a people's faith for purposes unrelated to or in opposition to the

[45] Rausch, "Introduction", *Evangelizing America*, 8.
[46] Deck, *Second Wave*, 93.
[47] Ibid., 94.

gospel."[48] Therefore, this lack of agreement hampers the vision to bring "the Good News into all the strata of humanity" and to maintain the correlation between evangelization, personal transformation, and social justice, a correlation that holds fast to Catholic identity and religious experience.

Second, the dichotomy fails to generate the level of renewal and reconciliation called for by the Church's vision for evangelization. With the Catholic Right, attempts at renewing social structures are frustrated by their emphasis on the transformation of the individual and in maintaining the status quo in society. Reconciliation too is thwarted by the myopic focus on sexual ethics and the failure to live up to pious expectations while disregarding the importance of seeking forgiveness for contributing to social ailments. The Catholic Left frustrates attempts to renew the individual and society in its dismissal of the need to focus on the renewal of the individual. Similarly, it does not address the reality that reconciliation is carried out by individuals and not institutional entities.

Lastly, the above appraisal also points to how certain interpretive approaches to reading the bible can burden the people it seeks to serve. This also demonstrates how the source of this dichotomy on missiological approaches extends beyond the interpretation and implementation of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, other post Second Vatican Council magisterial documents, and of Catholic doctrines.

The interpretation and implementation of the Roman Catholic Church's vision for evangelization by the Catholic Right and the Catholic Left also hinges on their hermeneutical methodology for reading the Bible. The new apologists of the Catholic Right disregard the Bible's historical development and read the Bible as proof-text for doctrinal and moral teachings of the magisterium as they protest against secularized

[48] Ibid., 104.

liberal theology and modernity. Likewise, they attribute the sayings of Jesus in the gospels to the historical Jesus and discount the stages of gospel development. For example, the New Oxford Review combines "a theological conservatism with an evangelical critique of contemporary culture, based on biblical text, the natural law tradition, and the authority of the magisterium."[49] Scott Hahn, a convert from evangelical Presbyterianism, uses the evangelical Protestant approach of reading the sacred scriptures in the service of Catholic apologetics to support the authority of the Church and its magisterial teaching.[50]

These approaches not only ignore ecclesial writings, such as *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, *Dei Verbum*, and the Pontifical Biblical Commission's statement on *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, but are employed to promote the Catholic Right's ideological agenda of preserving a pre-modern archetype for society as well as religious and moral life. For instance, the Catholic Right's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:1–9 demonstrates how a literalist reading construes a myopic focus on human sexuality that calls on married couples to live a monastic vocation within their marriages, one that perceives sexual intimacy as an ancillary expression of the married couples love for God and upholds celibacy as the purest form of spiritual life.[51] It is a pre-modern archetype that oppresses women, lacks multicultural sensitivity, and fails to dialogue with modernity. As a result, this hermeneutical method is a type of Catholic fundamentalism

[49] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 41.
[50] Ibid.
[51] While recently the Catholic Right speaks of the beauty of sexual intimacy and its ability to express the love of God, such beauty is conditioned by the couple's decision to live in chastity. This call to chastity is not so much about maintaining a monogamous relationship but rather abstinence from sexual activity as abstinence is the means to gain self-control and keep sexual intimacy from becoming a lustful action. One example of this view is John F. Kippley's *Marriage is for Keeps* (Cincinnati, OH: Foundation for the Family, 1994).

that in seeking to maintain the status quo neglects the Church's call to dialogue with modern culture and to transform dehumanizing social structures.

The Catholic Left's embrace of the Church's belief that revelation is contextual and in need of interpretation recognizes the contribution human authors render in conveying God's revelation in sacred scripture. Aware of the limitations of human language and the role that the socio-historical context plays in shaping thought, the Catholic Left reads the Bible through the lens of hermeneutical suspicion as it believes that the human accretions distort the purest essence of Jesus' proclamation. Consequently, as noted earlier, its approach aims to deconstruct the biblical texts and Christian tradition to attain the unembellished proclamation of Jesus, a proclamation untouched by the religious experience of the first century church. The search for this unblemished proclamation concentrates on the teaching material of Jesus found in the canonical gospels and discards the remaining gospel narrative material, e.g. the miracles and healings and the death and resurrection. What remains is Jesus the moral teacher, one who advocates for the transformation of the dehumanizing social constructs. Hence, though a hermeneutic of suspicion is a helpful approach to reading the Bible, an extreme and exclusive form of this hermeneutic, one where the biblical narrative is considered completely distorted and unreliable and which rejects religious experience as an epistemological source, reduces religion to a purely philosophical ethical framework for society which denies the importance of the individual person's transformative religious encounter with God. With this hermeneutical approach there is no need to speak of individual transformation.

The above contrasting methodologies point to a theological crisis precipitated by the Second Vatican Council's openness to critically dialogue with the modern world. The Council challenged the Roman Catholic Church to address, in an intelligible manner, the questions raised by the Enlightenment, for example, those concerning the cosmology found in biblical texts, the reliability of ancient manuscripts, and the authorship of the Bible. Therefore, underlying this dichotomy in approaches lies a deeper issue, "how to give an account of our faith which is able to enter into dialogue with a post-modern world and still remain faithful to the tradition."[52] For this undertaking "the point of departure for the evangelizer, then, must be a critical reading of the gospel and the magisterium, not the uncritical, cultural assumptions of the dominant group."[53]

From this point of departure, this thesis will now turn to the theological crisis precipitating this dichotomy, as a starting point for determining a reading of the Bible that can bridge the gap between the Catholic Right and the Catholic Left. It is a reading that will allow the vision for Roman Catholic evangelization to take hold and give an account of the Christian faith in a post-modern world while addressing the theological crisis that stands at the core of this concern.

A Theological Crisis in the Making

As previously noted, the dichotomy discussed points to a theological crisis, a crisis precipitated by the Second Vatican Council's openness to critically dialogue with the modern world. But theological disagreements resulting from new philosophical frameworks or scientific breakthroughs are not a novel occurrence. "In every period of major theological change there has been resistance to the new ideas and the new

[52] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 52.
[53] Deck, *Second Wave*, 113.

knowledge that were being put to the service of Christianity."[54] Hence, there is "no surprise that the present theological changes are once more producing divisive results in the Catholic community."[55] On one end of the spectrum there are those who hold a naïve enthusiasm towards the new scientific approaches as they perceive these approaches will have all the answers. On the other end, there are those who hold a rigid opposition to the new forms of critical inquiry.

The making of this current theological crisis is evident when one considers the history of the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century, a history that can be divided into three major periods.[56] The first period (1900–1940) was dominated by the Church's rejection of modern biblical criticism. It was a rejection grounded on the fear that the new critical forms of biblical interpretation would destroy the Church's doctrine. However a confluence of factors led to the questioning of the traditional Christian world view, such as the tragic fallout of two world wars, the Great Depression, advancement in the physical and biological sciences, the social sciences, and biblical scholarship. Eventually the Church learned that there is no way to avoid dealing with the results of responsible scholarship and recognized the need to enter into dialogue with them.[57] In response, the period immediately following the Second World War (1945–1970) witnessed the gradual appropriation of modern biblical criticism as a means to engage the mounting competing ideologies and metanarratives. It is this openness to critical theology, in particular modern biblical criticism, which influenced the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). As the period of the council is one of embracing

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[54] Raymond E. Brown, *Biblical Reflections on Crises Facing the Church*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1975). 4.

[55] Ibid., 5.

[56] Raymond E. Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), ix.

[57] Ibid.

new modern biblical criticism, the period following the council (1970–Present) is characterized by the task of assimilating and evaluating the implications these modern methods of biblical criticism had on Catholic doctrine, theology, and practice. In short, these three periods of the history of the Roman Catholic Church illustrate the development of, and stark contrast in, the methods of theological reflection in Catholic theology.

The classical model of the first third of the twentieth century was a neoscholastic approach that was speculative and deductive and proceeded from the universal to the particular.[58] In this approach the task of a Catholic theologian was to clarify and support the divine truth taught by the magisterium. But this approach stood in contrast to preceding Catholic theological approaches that embraced critical inquiry.[59] For instance, St. Thomas Aquinas emphasized that "a truth of faith could not stand at odds with the truth of reason," and "in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* he rejected a theological approach that relied on faith alone."[60] Yet, the Reformation in the sixteenth century defied Catholic identity, theology, and authority. Equally frustrating was the rise of the scientific method and the social sciences which, by introducing new insights about the world, the human person, and historical development, called into question the Christian metanarrative. Similarly, the Modernist movement challenged Catholic identify, doctrine and authority. Led by Catholic scholars like Alfred Loisy and George Tyrell, the movement represented the attempt by some Catholic scholars at the turn of the twentieth-century to "enter into dialogue with modernity by using modern methods of biblical and

[58] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 12.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

historical investigation."[61] The unfortunate implications of these modernist scholars were that they "relativized doctrines, rationalized whatever could not be explained scientifically, and reduced the content of revelation to subjective human experience."[62] In response mainstream Catholic theology became deductive, defensive, and apologetic as it sought to justify Catholic doctrine and relied on the authority of the magisterium as a theological source.[63]

In 1907 Pope Pius X promulgated his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* in which he condemned modernism.[64] The encyclical was followed by a fifty-year period of suspicion and repression towards theologians, the majority of whom were priests, while bishops had to take an annual oath against modernism. In this climate, the neoscholastic theology of the Roman schools became the norm, and scripture and tradition functioned as authoritative statements to clarify and defend the teachings of the Church. This function of scripture and tradition is noted in Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950) where it stated that the proper task of theologians was to indicate how the teachings of the magisterium were explicitly or implicitly present in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.[65]

However, though neoscholasticism sought to defend magisterial teaching by calling on the authority of scripture and tradition, the reality was quite different. "Instead of Scripture and Tradition, it was all too often Scripture being swallowed by Tradition. The appropriate dialectical tension between Scripture and Tradition tended to be

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[61] Thomas P. Rausch, *Catholicism in the Third Millennium*, 2nd ed., (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 4.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 12.
[64] Ibid., 13.
[65] Ibid.

weakened, because Scripture lost its 'otherness,' and therefore its capacity to challenge rather than simply confirm Tradition."[66] Consequently, scripture functioned as a set of "predictable proof-texts for theological positions, rather than provoke theology to deeper insight into the divine mystery."[67] But to be Catholic is to think inclusively, to tend toward the "both/and" more than toward the "either/or."[68] Unfortunately, the "both/and" of Scripture and Tradition collapsed into "*Sola Traditio.*"[69] In the end, Tradition, as interpreted by the magisterium, trumped and subordinated Scripture.

Nonetheless, while Pope Pius XII defined the task of Catholic theologians as one which searched for how Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition supported the teachings of the magisterium, it was Pope Pius XII who, in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), acknowledge the place of historical consciousness in Catholic theology by encouraging a limited use of the modern biblical criticisms.[70] This appropriation of modern biblical criticisms by the magisterium resulted from the work of Catholic theologians, like Yves Congar and Karl Rahner, who contributed to the movement termed the *Nouvelle Théologie*. This alternative theological movement began in France and Germany in the 1920s.[71] The movement was characterized by the term *ressourcement* as Catholic scholars sought to "return to the sources of Catholicism in Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, and philosophy."[72] In *Vraie et reforme dans l'Eglise* (1950),

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[66] Luke T. Johnson, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 7.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 5.
[69] Ibid., 8.
[70] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 14.
[71] Rausch, *Catholicism in the Third Millennium*, 7.
[72] Ibid., 5.

Yves Congar laid out a process for reform in the Catholic Church.[73] In this work Congar addressed the place of sin in the Church and how reform should take place, the four conditions for a reform without schism, and his argument for how the time is right for reform.[74] In his works *Geist in Welt* (1939) and *Horer des Wortes* (1941), Karl Rahner "reconstructed neoscholastic natural theology" and presented "a theological anthropology in which these finite human beings which we are, are by nature open to hearing the Word — the Word who, as Christian faith maintains, has become incarnate in Jesus Christ."[75] These contributions by Congar and Rahner, as well as works by Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, Marie-Dominique Chenu and others, gave rise to currents of renewal in the Catholic Church in the 1940s and 1950s.

The openness to historical consciousness by *Divino Afflante Spiritu* marked a significant shift in Catholic theology and allowed Catholic theologians to appropriate a more critical theology which reexamined the sources of Catholic theology, investigated historical developments, reinterpreted traditional formulas, and turned towards experience.[76] Shaped by the developments in physical, historical, and linguistic methods, the scientific critical study of the Bible revolutionized views once held in the past regarding biblical authorship, origin, dating of the biblical books, composition, and what the intent of the authors meant.[77] By the mid-1950's the scientific approach to reading the Bible led Catholic exegetes to abandon all the positions on biblical authorship, the literal historical interpretation of the creation stories in Genesis, and the literary unity of

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[73] Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 35.
[74] Ibid., 41.
[75] Ibid., 91.
[76] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 14.
[77] Brown, *Biblical Reflections*, 6–7.

texts, like the book of Isaiah. By the mid-twentieth century, the appropriation of historical consciousness as a method for doing Catholic theology was bringing renewal in the Roman Catholic Church.

The epitome of this wave of renewal in the Catholic Church is the Second Vatican Council. In his speech opening the council, John XXIII "opened the possibility of distinguishing between a revealed doctrine and the way in which it has been formulated."[78]

> The Pope's statement led many to the conclusion that the doctrinal statements of the Church were under a similar historical limitation. While doctrinal formulations of the past captured an aspect of revealed truth, they did not exhaust it; they represent the limited insight of one period of Church history which can be modified in another period of Church history as Christians approach the truth from a different direction or with new tools of investigation.[79]

This shift in the manner of carrying out Catholic theology drew objections from conservatives in the Church. Still, despite these objections, the Pontifical Biblical Commission pushed further in their 1964 *Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels*. In this document the commission made clear that the gospels are "not literal, chronological accounts of the words and deeds of Jesus but are the product of a development through years of preaching, selection, synthesizing and explication."[80] This position recognized three stages of gospel development, of which the *Instructions* offered a description.[81] Furthermore it affirmed that, from the tradition received, the evangelists "selected the things which were suited to the various situations of the faithful and to the purpose which they had in mind, and adapted their narration of them to the same

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[78] Ibid., 10.
[79] Ibid., 11.
[80] Ibid., 7.
[81] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "Instruction Concerning the Historical Truth of the Gospels (1964)," available from http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_HistTruthFitzmyer.htm#PBCText, accessed on 6 March 2012, par. VI–IX.

situations and purpose."[82] For this reason the *Instructions* call on the Catholic exegete to utilize, along with the help of God and the Church, "the new exegetical aids, above all those which the historical method . . . a method which carefully investigates sources and defines their nature and value, and makes use of such helps as textual criticism, literary criticism, and the study of languages."[83] The significance of this move to employ these new critical methods is present in the *Instructions* when it states,

> Unless the exegete pays attention to all these things which pertain to the origin and composition of the Gospels and makes proper use of all the laudable achievements of recent research, he will not fulfil his task of probing into what the sacred writers intended and what they really said. From the results of the new investigations it is apparent that the doctrine and the life of Jesus were not simply reported for the sole purpose of being remembered, but were "preached" so as to offer the Church a basis of faith and of morals. The interpreter (then), by tirelessly scrutinizing the testimony of the Evangelists, will be able to illustrate more profoundly the perennial theological value of the Gospels and bring out clearly how necessary and important the Church's interpretation is.[84]

This openness to modern biblical criticisms and to the outcomes this new research was providing came to fruition in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*. First, *Dei Verbum* rehabilitated the place of Sacred Scripture from one of subordination to Sacred Tradition to a relationship of mutual influence between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.[85] *Dei Verbum* asserted that both Scripture and Tradition are "to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence."[86] Similarly, "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God."[87] This assertion about the relationship between

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[82] Ibid., par. IX.
[83] Ibid., par. IV.
[84] Ibid., X.
[85] Brown, *Biblical Reflections*, 10.
[86] Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*, 1965)," available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, accessed on 6 March 2012, II., 9.
[87] Ibid., II. 10.

Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition reestablished a system of checks and balances. It was no longer the role of Sacred Tradition to establish Church teaching and for Sacred Scripture to support new theological developments through proof-texting. Instead, Church teaching now flowed from a mutual interdependence between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. In this manner *Dei Verbum* allowed Sacred Scripture to regain its sense of otherness. Hence, just as the "loss of Scripture's 'otherness' had thrown the both/and balance of Catholicism out of whack," so then the recovery of Sacred Scripture's otherness contributed to a renewal in Catholicism.[88]

Dei Verbum also rejected the literalist approach to reading the Bible, and with it the understanding of revelation as divine dictation. In speaking of the authorship and composition of the Bible, *Dei Verbum* states that "in composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities."[89] Correspondingly, when interpreting the biblical texts *Dei Verbum* advocates that, "the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words."[90] This calls on the interpreter to "investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture." Given this view, *Dei Verbum* recognizes that God's self-communication is expressed in the human language and cultural symbols of a particular location and historical period. Since these languages and symbols are distinct from our own a historical critical analysis of the biblical texts is necessary. It is an

[88] Johnson, *Future of Catholic Biblical*, 8.
[89] Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," III., 11.
[90] Ibid., III., 12.

analysis that calls on the interpreter to understand the historical setting in which the author wrote and the meaning of key concepts as the author uses them as the interpreter works to grasp the intent of the author. This rejection of a literalistic reading of the Bible and the call to engage in historical critical analysis demonstrates the openness of the Roman Catholic Church to modern biblical criticism and to the otherness of Sacred Scripture to reform Catholic theology. It is then a shift in paradigm from a classical view of reading the Bible to a reading of the Bible that is grounded in historical consciousness.

Similarly, in rejecting the notion of divine dictation, *Dei Verbum* also disallowed the belief that the bible is inerrant in historical and scientific matters. In addressing the inerrancy of the books of Scripture *Dei Verbum* declares "that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation."[91] Notable is the qualification made by *Dei Verbum* delineating what in the Bible is without error — that which is for the sake of our salvation. In doing so, *Dei Verbum* allows for error to exist in the Bible in areas regarding science and history. That which is for the sake of our salvation does not rest on the historical or scientific accuracy of the Bible but in what the biblical authors sought to convey.[92] This qualification also suggests that the aim of the Bible is not to convey a historical account of the people of Israel, Jesus, or the apostolic church, but to offer salvation as "all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work

[91] Ibid., III., 11.

[92] *Dei Verbum* in III., 12, states, "But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out."

of every kind."[93] The juxtaposition between the inerrancy of scripture limited to that which is for the sake of salvation and of scripture's task in the teaching of truth and refuting error indicates that the truth scripture is concerned with is not historical or scientific datum but is soteriological in nature. This negation of the Bible's capacity for historical and scientific inerrancy exemplifies the fruits of theological reform resulting from the shift to historical consciousness, a negation which abets theologians by allowing theological reflection to concentrate on the religious dimension of human experience and enter into dialogue with modernity and cultural contexts.

As evident from *Dei Verbum*, Catholic theology underwent a significant change in adopting modern biblical criticism and historical consciousness in the mid-twentieth century. This change bestowed the succeeding generation of Roman Catholics with the responsibility of assimilating and evaluating the change put in place, a change which exhibited mixed results.

One positive contribution in defining the role of the Bible as one that offers the basis of faith and moral living was that the Second Vatican Council created a line of demarcation determining the arena in which the Bible claims authority and where it does not; where the Bible can provide guidance and judgment and where it cannot. It is clear from *Dei Verbum* that though the Bible contains history it is not intended to be an authority in historical matters. The same holds true in matters of science. The Bible presents a cosmological depiction of the universe but it is not authoritative in passing judgment on contemporary scientific inquiry. This new approach frees the Bible from the embarrassment it created when anyone attempts to exert the authority of the Bible in areas where it has no authority. Furthermore, it divorces the authority and reliability of

[93] Ibid.

the Bible from any particular perception of history and science, perceptions which are subject to change as new insights in these respective fields develop. From *Dei Verbum* it is also clear that the line of demarcation accentuates the arena of which the Bible does have authority, can provide guidance, and pass judgment. This is the arena of religious experience where in speaking on matters for the sake of salvation the bible aims to teach truth, refute error, and reform manners and discipline. The result of this demarcation is that *Dei Verbum* allows the Bible to be relevant to the faithful who live in a rapidly changing modern world by focusing on human religious experience, questions of belief, personal ethics, and social justice.

Similarly, the adoption of modern biblical criticism and historical consciousness allowed for the recognition of the historical limitations of doctrinal statements. In his opening address of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII called to reformulate doctrines in contemporary terms.[94] He went on to suggest that "truths which are contained in our time-honored teaching is one thing; the manner in which these truths are set forth (with their meaning preserved intact) is something else."[95] This call for contextualization helps make doctrinal statements relevant to contemporary society as Church teachings engage in dialogue with modernity in a way that speaks to present religious experience.

However, in unleashing a current of renewal, this new approach probed into questions long unaddressed or excluded from discussion.[96] This is exemplified in the manner in which new critical readings of the Bible raised questions regarding the

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[94] John XXIII, "Address at the Opening of Vatican II Council (1962)," available from http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/pope0261i.htm, accessed on 8 March 2012.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 18.

Catholic beliefs concerning Mary and celibacy. In its otherness the New Testament references to Jesus' brothers provoked doubts on the Catholic doctrine on Mary's perpetual virginity along with the lure of celibacy as the archetype of spiritual life.[97] Adding to the question of the significance of celibacy to living a spiritual life is the biblical witness of Simon Peter, considered by Catholics as the first Pope, having a mother-in-law.[98] This latter witness also contributes to the debate over celibacy in the priesthood. Lastly, a critical reading of 1 Cor 7:1–9 offers a renewed appraisal of Paul's view on human sexuality and celibacy. While it was previously thought the slogan in v. 1b, "it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman," was Paul's thesis on Christian sexual ethics, today scholars consider the slogan represents the sexual asceticism of some members of the Corinthian community.[99] Paul responds to this asceticism by affirming the responsibility of sexual intimacy among married couples. Evident in these examples then is the way in which the turn towards historical consciousness and the otherness of scripture served to reevaluate Catholic beliefs.

At the heart of this turn towards historical consciousness is the historical-critical method. The method employs historical and literary criticisms to establish "the ancient foundations of the people of God and of the Christian Church and to understand the meaning of the ancient records of God's dealings with his people and of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and its sequel."[100] The method is considered historical as it borrows its methodology from historical and literary criticism.[101] The method is critical because its

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[97] See Mark 3:31, 6:3, Matt 12:46, 13:55, Luke 8:19-25, Acts 1:14, and Gal 1-19.

[98] See Mark 1:29, Matt 8:14, and Luke 8:4:38.

[99] Daniel J. Harrington, ed., *Sacra Pagina*, vol. 1, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, by Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 252.

[100] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Scripture, the Soul of Theology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1994) 7.

[101] Ibid., 20.

analysis seeks to arrive at a historical and literary judgment regarding the reading of biblical texts.

As a scientific approach, the method begins by asking questions about the biblical passage or book.[102] The questions regard issues like the (1) authenticity and unity of the text, (2) date and place of composition, (3) the structure and literary form of the text, (4) the occasion and purpose of the writing, and (5) its literary background. To answer these questions the historical-critical method relies on six kinds of critical techniques.[103] Textual criticism compares the different manuscripts of the same text and looks at discrepancies and similarities in the hope of arriving at the manuscripts that are closest to the original text. To do so, textual criticism deals with "the transmission of the biblical text in its original language and in ancient versions."[104] Historical criticism looks at the historical setting of a biblical text to reconstruct the historical milieu in which the writing arose and the process of how it came to be written; in other words to appraise how much of the biblical passage reflects the historical reality. Literary criticism studies the world the text itself creates by centering on the literary and stylistic character of the writing and with the text as a finished product. Form criticism specifies the literary genre of a text in order to ask the right questions of the text and compares the text with other non-biblical writings of similar genre and period. Source criticism labors to determine the prehistory of a biblical book by identifying its sources. Finally, redaction criticism looks at how the authors shaped the material they inherited to fit their own literary and religious purpose.

[102] Ibid., 20.
[103] Ibid., 20–23.
[104] Ibid., 20.

The end result of these techniques is to ascertain the literal sense of the text; what the author meant to say to his audience.[105]

For the Catholic interpreter, the historical-critical method is of importance because "what ultimately lies behind a faith-accompanied critical reading of Scripture in the Church is the conviction that God's revelation to His people took place in the past . . . and that the record of that self-manifestation of God is disclosed to the Church through Christ Jesus in the Bible, in the Word of God couched in ancient human working."[106] For this reason the Catholic interpreter "employs the philological tools and techniques of the historical-critical method in order to ascertain the textual, contextual, and relational meaning of a biblical passage or book."[107] It is the combination of the textual (the sense of the words and phrases), contextual (the sense of the words or phrases in a given passage or episode), and relational (the sense of words and phrases in relation to the book or corpus of works as a whole) meanings of a passage which come together to constitute the given passage's or book's theological or religious meaning. For this reason, a historical-critical reading of the Bible plays an important role in the life of the Church itself.[108]

Unfortunately, the results of the historical-critical method have been ambiguous and not as expected.[109] Though there are those who would disagree with this evaluation, Luke T. Johnson's analogy of the three generations of immigrants, and their respective perspectives on life in the United States, serves to explain the mixed responses of three

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[105] Ibid., 7.
[106] Ibid., 30–31.
[107] Ibid., 30.
[108] Ibid., 31.
[109] Johnson, *Future of Catholic Biblical*, 10.

generations of Catholic theologians towards the contribution of the historical-critical method on Catholic theology.[110]

The first generation of scholars, those who received a traditional education and matured in the pre-Vatican II period, adopted the historical-critical method with eagerness and anticipation. They understood this method to be a positive addition that would reinforce their strong Catholic identity. The second generation of scholars, being the first to be schooled in critical scholarship, uncritically accepted the "dominant-historical paradigm, and a style of scholarship that was increasingly directed to . . . other scholars."[111] The third generation of scholars consists of those who grew up in the post-Tridentine Church and underwent the changes resulting from the Second Vatican Council. These scholars are grateful for their inheritance of the historical-critical method but are aware of the implications of this method and question if the losses have not been as great as the gains. Like the third-generation of immigrants, these scholars tend to reexamine what they have inherited and seek to recover some of the cultural riches they have lost.

A word to describe the sentiment of this third generation of Catholic scholars is the word disillusionment.[112] The cause of this disillusionment lies in four realizations.[113] First is the realization that the historical-critical method has operated as a historical-critical model. A model is a "paradigm within which the data appropriate to a discipline makes sense."[114] As such, a model's effectiveness depends on its ability to cover the data

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[110] Ibid., 10–15.
[111] Ibid., 12.
[112] Ibid., 16.
[113] See Ibid., 14.
[114] Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 3d ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 4.

and allow for further investigation. A model differs from a method in that a model conceives the task of interpretation as a whole by representing "a sort of imaginative construal of the materials being studied, a structured picture of both process and product, within which the parts are seen not only to fit but also to function."[115] A model then employs various methods in the process of interpretation. However, problems arise when a method unknowingly becomes a model. When this occurs the data and the method are distorted as "a particular way of questioning data unintentionally become an implicit but comprehensive understanding of what the material is about."[116] Accordingly, the historical-critical model, rather than learning history to better grasp the literal sense of the biblical passage or book, considers the biblical texts as historical sources for the reconstruction of the history of ancient Israel, Jesus, and early Christianity.[117]

Second, the historical-critical model did not deliver what it promised to deliver.[118] Rather than producing a cohesive historical reconstruction of ancient Israel or Jesus, the model yielded a panoply of possible historical scenarios; scenarios utilized to challenge traditional faith. Another aspect of the model's failure to deliver was its inability to contribute to the life of faith of Christian communities. Given that the New Testament reflects religious experience, the historical-critical model believes this experience distorts the historical data within the New Testament. Hence the historical-critical model's effort is to sort through the data and peel the religious accretion to arrive at the essential historical event. In the process, any narratives or books of the New Testament that cannot assist in the historical reconstruction are discarded. In this manner, the historical-

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[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Johnson, *Future of Catholic Biblical*, 14.
[118] Ibid., 14–15.

critical model proved unsuccessful in meeting the expectations of the first generation of Catholic scholars who campaigned for its place in the practice of Catholic theology.

The third realization is the hegemonic character of the historical-critical model as in claiming exclusive right to being the "critical" approach to interpreting the Bible the model labels other readings as uncritical.[119] This move made the literal sense of scripture equivalent to the historical sense and, in so doing, gave the historical sense a normative authority. Regrettably, as a normative reading, the historical-critical model dismisses other readings instead of inviting them to contribute to the task of biblical interpretation while respecting the historical sense.

The fourth realization is that the historical-critical model is not theologically neutral.[120] The model follows the Protestant either/or scheme that demands a choice for one thing over another and as such cannot reconcile itself with the Catholic both/and. Therefore, the historical-critical model cannot account for the dialectical harmony of the mutual influence between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.[121]

The disillusionment of the third generation of Catholic scholars is then grounded in the historical-critical model's incompatibility with Catholic theology's tensive relationship between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and its too frequent use to challenge traditional Christian faith. Likewise, the model's dismissal of other biblical readings discards other Christian experiences, leaving a model that is sterile in feeding the religious life of the members of the Church.

This disillusionment with the historical-critical model contributed to the questioning of the place of this model in service of the Church and of theology as a

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[119] Ibid., 15.
[120] Ibid., 15–16.
[121] Ibid., 29.

critical discipline. On the one hand there are some liberal scholars who think that the meaning derived from biblical criticism is only for scholarly concern and holds no applicability to modern religious issues.[122] Other scholars consider the quest for the literal sense to be the right approach but do not consider the Bible to be very important.[123] Still others argue that a critical reading uncovers the sense of the Bible but not the most important meaning.[124] In response, conservative Catholics, unable to see the connection between the work of academic theology and their lived experience, grow in fear that contemporary theology is purely an academic exercise which ignores their religious experience.[125] Many religious people then prefer a less sophisticated or even literalist approach to reading Scripture as they find it spiritually inspiring and consider a critical reading of the Bible to be sterile in providing spiritual insight.[126] Complicating the debate over the place of critical scholarship in the Church are the ultra-conservatives who do not respect the Popes or the Bishops embrace of modern biblical and theological scholarship and condemn these modern theological methods to be heretical.[127] The result is a chasm between the academic study of theology and the lived reality of the Church, between theologians and the magisterium and the faithful.[128] In the end, this debate over the role of modern biblical criticism and historical consciousness in Catholic theological reflection and in the life of the Church invigorates the dichotomy visible in models of evangelization today.

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[122] Brown, *Critical Meaning*, viii.
[123] Ibid., 24.
[124] Ibid., 25.
[125] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 18.
[126] Brown, *Critical Meaning*, viii.
[127] Brown, *Biblical Reflections*, 13.
[128] Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason*, 18.

A Viable Model for Biblical Interpretation

Evident at this point is the inadequacy of a literalist interpretation of the Bible to addresses the queries provoked by modern thought. Moreover, a return to a non-critical biblicism is not the appropriate answer as it "often tends to confirm the Church(es) and Christians in their *status quo* because the Bible so read yields what they have always thought it meant."[129] The viable alternative is to make use of modern biblical criticisms and engage in critical theological reflection. This calls for a hermeneutical model that affirms the necessity of historical inquiry while safeguarding this inquiry from the precarious outcomes of the historical-critical model. The model should also account for human religious experience and be mindful of the biblical texts' literary character. It is a hermeneutical model that can assist in bridging the gap between the academy and the Church and be a catalyst for dialogue and reconciliation between the Catholic Right and the Catholic Left that can lead to a holistic implementation of the post Vatican II vision for evangelization. Given these desired expectations, Luke T. Johnson's experience-interpretation model is a viable alternative model for biblical interpretation and one that can assist in the task at hand as the model allows for the anthropological, historical, literary, and religious dimensions of the biblical texts. [130]

The suitability of the experience-interpretation and its four dimensions lies in the fact that the model pays attention "to the integral elements of the writings and to the dynamics of their production."[131] First, the anthropological dimension of the model takes seriously the human contribution in the composition of the biblical texts.[132] It also

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[129] Brown, *Critical Meaning*, viii.
[130] Johnson, *The Writings*, 5-6.
[131] Ibid., 10.
[132] Ibid., 5.

considers that present in these writings is the universal dynamic of the human search for meaning. This search reflects the interplay between myth and experience in the shaping of the symbolic world, or "the system of meanings that anchors the activities of individuals and communities in the real world."[133] Finally, it acknowledges that intrinsic to being human are religious experiences and ideas which structure the lives of people.

The historical dimension affirms that the New Testament, being the result of human composition, needs to be read within its first-century Judaic and Mediterranean context.[134] Here the historical-critical method is important as the social structures and symbols of the New Testament are different from our own. For example, if the search for human meaning reflects the interplay between myth and experience in the shaping of the symbolic world, then understanding the specific contexts and applications of these myths in first-century Judaism is pertinent. As such, the historical-critical method is unavoidable as these writings are conditioned by the times and location of their composition. It should be noted, however, that any concern of a misguided application of historical inquiry is checked by the fact that it is a method undertaken within a particular model, that of experience-interpretation. Within this model then, and in conjunction with other methods, "the historical-critical method opens up to the modern reader a path to the meaning of the biblical text such as we have it today."[135]

The literary facet of the experience-interpretation model takes on the New Testament books as compositions.[136] This facet studies the writings in terms of their self-presentation and pays attention to the literary conventions of the time of writing. As a

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[133] Ibid., 10.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (1994)," available from http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/pbcinter.htm, accessed on 6 March 2012, I., A., 4.
[136] Johnson, *The Writings*, 5.

literary study, it seeks "a fit between the literary structure and substance."[137] In this approach, the reader considers the implication of the genre and rhetoric of the texts. This emphasis rehabilitates the status of the New Testament books by elevating them from historical sources to the primary focus of study.

A witness of the importance of a literary study is the Pontifical Biblical Commission's statement on narrative criticism. The Commission writes, "narrative exegesis offers a method of understanding and communicating the biblical message which corresponds to the form of story and personal testimony, something characteristic of holy Scripture and, of course, a fundamental modality of communication between human persons."[138] The Commission goes on to suggest that, "The usefulness of narrative analysis for the exegesis of the Bible is clear . . . It can facilitate the transition, often so difficult, from the meaning of the text in its historical context . . . to its significance for the reader of today."[139]

The religious dimension acknowledges the writings of New Testament are foremost religious texts as they arose from a religious movement.[140] As a collection of religious writings they seek to discern "the implications of religious experience and conviction for life in the community and the world."[141] The term religious, within the experience-interpretation model, refers to

> experiences, convictions, and interpretations having to do with what is perceived as ultimate other. The term points to a way of being human, a way both individual and social that asserts by word and deed that human existence is bound by, and defined in reference to, realities transcending everyday categories.[142]

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[137] Ibid., 5.
[138] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," I., B., 2.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Johnson, *The Writings*, 5.
[141] Ibid., 6.
[142] Ibid.

In affirming these writings as religious, the model recognizes that the writings claim to speak about life as related to God. "Their subject matter concerns what it means to be human in light of faith, specifically in light of the experience of the Holy that the first Christians claimed to have had in Jesus."[143] As religious texts, the writings of the New Testament do not mediate religious experience but are a witness and interpretation of "religious claims having to do with the experience of God as mediated through Jesus."[144] In this sense, the understanding of the Bible as the Word of God "really means divine revelation to which human beings have given an expression in words."[145]

Viewed from the lens of the experience-interpretation model, the interpreter is reminded that the New Testament originates in the living expression of a living experience.[146] In the case of the New Testament, this living experience is the experience of the risen Christ who is the catalyst of Christian faith, or of the human response to God as encountered in Jesus Christ.[147] This experience shakes the foundation of being and demands interpretation as the person or a community seeks to construe meaning of the encounter. The New Testament, therefore, "emerged from powerful religious experiences that demanded the reinterpretation of a symbolic world."[148]

The symbolic world, as previously mentioned, is the system of shared meanings that grounds the activities of individuals and communities in their quest for meaning, to which religious experience is intrinsic. This grounding capacity rests on the ability of

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[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Brown, *Critical Meaning*, 14.
[146] Johnson, *The Writings*, 1.
[147] John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P8.HTM, accessed on 9 March 2012, par. 26.
[148] Johnson, *The Writings*, 4.

symbols to provide meaningful equivalents of things which belong to another reality.[149] In other words, "symbols do not refer to that which is already understood, but rather, represent the attempt to 'push forward the frontiers of knowledge and to grasp the reality of things, the nature of life, the stuff of existence itself."[150] This symbolic activity takes place in the realm of imagination, as it belongs to the subjective order of meaning, and seeks to provide meaning of what is emotionally experienced.

Symbols then are evocative and suggestive and invite people to understanding. As such, the symbolic world articulates a group's self-understanding and permits human function and interaction to occur in daily existence.[151]

A community's self-understanding is given a narrative form by myth as myths supply transcendent realities with the language necessary to express the meaning inherent in the structures of shared life. [152] Communities, therefore, exist within a dialect between experience and interpretation where myths and symbols serve to interpret human experience.[153] In this manner, myth and symbol can make new meaning available to members of the community who share similar symbols.[154] However, there are instances when myths and symbols fail and are forced to be reshaped or abandoned. For instance, when experience undermines an individual's or a community's world view its symbolic world is compromised. The result is a community that finds itself struggling for meaning where meaning is now absent. When this cognitive dissonance occurs, the community either stretches the symbol or the symbol will have to be totally reworked and

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[149] Celia Deutsch, "Wisdom in Matthew: Transformation of a Symbol," *Novum Testamentum* 32 (1990) : n. 1, 14.
[150] Ibid., 15.
[151] Johnson, *The Writings*, 10–11.
[152] Ibid., 15.
[153] Ibid., 13.
[154] Deutsch, "Wisdom in Matthew", 16.

reinterpreted. Consequently, "when the interpretation of a myth is so fundamentally new that it constitutes a different myth, the foundations of the symbolic world will shift."[155] As such, "myth and symbol . . . can transform themselves" in accommodating new experiences.[156]

This dialectic between experience and interpretation is the basis for interpreting the writings of the New Testament.[157] As this dialectic calls on the reader to study the New Testament within the first-century symbolic world of Judaism, it allows for the interpreter to probe into the experience that generated the process of interpreting the symbols of Judaism. It also permits the reader to approach the writings of the New Testament as specific modes of interpreting the symbols of Judaism in light of the experience of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a reinterpretation of the symbols of the Old Testament in response to the Easter faith. Thus, a serious reading of the New Testament requires one to read the symbolic world of the Old Testament differently as this symbolic world has been radically reworked by New Testament authors.[158]

The implications of this experience-interpretation model are several. First, the model calls on contemporary readers to reflect on their own religious experience of their encounter with the risen Christ. This reflection on the religious experience of the risen Lord serves as a point of convergence where the experience of the first century Church and that of the contemporary reader intersect and allows for a point of entry for the modern to reader to relate to the experience of the first century church. This also

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[155] Johnson, *The Writings*, 12.
[156] Deutsch, "Wisdom in Matthew", 16.
[157] Johnson, *The Writings*,14.
[158] Ibid., 2.

provides a means for a modern-critical reading of the bible to contribute to the religious life of the Christian community. Second, the model's recognition that the writings of the New Testament are specific modes of interpreting the symbolic world of Torah in light of their religious encounter with God in Christ justifies the Roman Catholic Church's call for the contextualization of the Gospel. In this sense, the contextualization of the Gospel in contemporary society is an application of the hermeneutical model used by the first century church as witnessed in the New Testament. Lastly, the model invites the contemporary Christian church to see the mundane anew by inspiring our creativity to make the reign of God present on earth by reimagining the quotidian structures in light of the Gospel. The transformation of these structures is achieved by the conversion of the imagination of the human subject who is the means by which the reign of God is made effective. In sum, the experience-interpretation model's ability to function as an entry point for the modern reader to engage in a critical reading of the Bible, its encouragement of contextualization, and its lure to Christianize the daily lived experience makes it a viable model to reconcile the estrangement in approaches of Catholic evangelization.

The Experience-Interpretation Model and Matthew 11:25-30

The Second Vatican Council's recovery of the Catholic Church's commitment to its missionary vocation towards the world places upon the succeeding generations of Roman Catholics the responsibility to implement this vision. The vision exhorts the Catholic faithful to identify with the marginalized and to transform unjust structures by means of the renewal of the individual who is reconciled with God and others in Christ. It is an exhortation carried out by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ in relevant and effective ways. But, as illustrated above, this commission has been marred by ideological

differences concerning the manner in which Christian doctrines and the Bible, the latter being the focus of our study, are to be interpreted. This division ruptured the interdependence between the transformation of the individual and of social structures necessary to proclaim the Gospel with relevance and effectiveness. The outcome was a laying of burdens on the Catholic faithful resulting from an uncritical reading of the Bible on the one hand and the loss of Catholic identity on the other. The former burdened the faithful by failing to act on behalf of justice by maintaining the status quo. The latter relativized Jesus to the point where religious experience and Christian identity are inconsequential. This leaves us with two approaches. The first fails to dialogue with modernity and to address contemporary questions and concerns. The second engages modernity but forfeits its Christian heritage. Given that Matt 11:25–30 affirms Jesus' exclusive role as the revealer of the Father and presents Jesus' invitation to those who are weary and carry heavy burdens to take his yoke as he offers rest for their souls, this final section will apply the experience-interpretation model in reading Matthew 11:25–30. This reading will present a literary analysis of the passage and then expound on the passage by reading it as a specific mode of interpreting the symbols of Judaism, one where Matthew appropriates and reinterprets the Judaic symbols of Torah and Hokmah.

Matt 11:25–30 is the conclusion to a larger discourse taking place in 11:1–30 where Jesus responds to the question raised by the disciples of John the Baptist, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another" (11:3)? The reader, aware of the narrative development so far, can answer with an affirmative yes. Beginning with Jesus' adult ministry in chapters 3 and 4, Matthew set forth his argument regarding Jesus' identity as the Son of God and legitimate interpreter of Torah. This claim is attested by

Jesus' teaching and deeds in chapters 5–10. For instance, upon completing his teachings on the ethics of the kingdom in 5 through 7, "the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (7:28) — a task the scribes were unable accomplish as they were not legitimate interpreters of Torah. Furthermore, Jesus' authority is not limited to his teachings but also extends to his ability to forgive sins on earth (9:6). In this manner, Matthew attests to Jesus' divine authority, an assertion confirmed by the charge of blasphemy posed by the scribes who witnessed his offering of forgiveness to the paralytic. Once again the crowds are in awe (9:8). Lastly, Jesus' authority and command of Torah and the Prophets stands juxtaposed to the Pharisees' inability to understand their sacred writings. In 9:10–13, we hear that, while sitting with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus responds to the Pharisees' criticism by implying that the Pharisees do not have a grasp of Hosea 6:6, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings," a claim Jesus will make again in 12:7 while discussing Sabbath practice. The result of the Scribes' and Pharisees' inability to comment on Torah and the Prophets with authority and aptitude is a lack of leadership among the people of Israel, "they are like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36). Jesus responds to this crisis by commissioning twelve apostles to partake in his mission of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers, and casting out demons (10:7).

Within this context, the question raised by the disciples of John the Baptist in 11:3 does not offer any new understandings of Jesus' identity but rather offers the occasion to address the question of Jesus' identity from a different vantage point, that of Jesus' own witness as the exclusive revealer of the Father, and thus the legitimate interpreter of

Torah. Hence, as the legitimate interpreter, Jesus now has the last word on this matter. The scene's climatic purpose is heightened by the manner in which Matthew employs Markan material and Jesus' application of the sapiential tradition to his self-understanding.

In reading Matthew 11:7–14 one observes that v. 10 is a parallel to Mark 1:2. In Mark, this quote from Malachi 3:1 is found in the opening of the gospel and is part of the introduction to John the Baptist's ministry. In contrast, Matthew omits this passage from his introduction of John's ministry and places it in this context which seeks to clarify John's ministry as a way to validate Jesus' identity. Moreover, the quote is not cited by the narrator but instead is placed on Jesus' lips. And so it is Jesus who interprets his mission and identity in messianic terms as he portrays John as the prophet Elijah who is to come as the forerunner of the messianic age. Jesus also references sapiential tradition to buttress his case by taking on the identity of Lady Wisdom. In 11:19 Jesus says, "Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." This is why his first response to John's disciples in 11:4–5 consists of referring to his deeds described in Matt 7 through 10. Like Lady Wisdom, Jesus is vindicated by his deeds. Jesus then reproaches those who still do not repent despite their witness to his proclamation and deeds (11:20–24).

In his conclusion of 11:1–30, Matthew takes on the sapiential tradition in vv. 25–30 as he continues his exposition. In v. 25 Jesus gives thanks to the Father for "hiding these things from the wise and the intelligent" and revealing them to infants (11:25). Likewise, these "hidden things" will be revealed by the Son alone as he is the only who knows the Father and as such can reveal the Father's will (11:26–27). One implication of Jesus' thanksgiving is that divine wisdom does not rest with the wise or intelligent —

with the Pharisees and Scribes as one would expect — but it is found among the lowly, the infants of society who have little knowledge, power, or wealth yet have embraced Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom. From this narrative standpoint, Jesus understands himself as one who imparts divine wisdom through his legitimate and authoritative interpretation of Torah, as divine wisdom is found in observing the commandments (Sir 1:26).

In this capacity, Jesus' interpretation of Torah has the means to lighten the burdens of Torah imposed by the Pharisees (11:28–30). It is the Scribes and Pharisees who "sit on Moses' seat" and "tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others" (Matt 23:3–4). As a result Torah becomes burdensome and torments the soul as the Law becomes almost impossible to live up to and threatens the status of a person's relationship with God. In contrast, one finds rest by embracing Jesus' teachings on Torah. This is illustrated in the following two passages concerning the Sabbath — the picking of grain (12:1–8) and the healing of the man with the withered hand (12:9–13) — passages where Jesus' interpretations emphasize God's mercy as a hermeneutical lens for abiding in God's Law. Therefore, in the first scene regarding the picking of grain (12:7), Jesus again calls out the Pharisees for not understanding Hosea 6:6. In light of this insight, Jesus invites the crowds to come and learn from him since, as the true interpreter and revealer of God's divine will and Law, he offers rest from the encumbrance caused by flawed interpretations of Torah as it is in living Jesus' interpretation of Torah where a person finds assurance that they are in right relationship with God. It is an invitation to embrace the kingdom of heaven that is breaking through in his preaching and deeds as evident so far in Matt 5–10.

As the question regarding Jesus' identity comes to a close with his own affirmation, the invitation presented in 11:28–30 leads to the question regarding the nature of one's response to the kingdom of heaven. As mentioned above, Matthew 12:1–14 affirmed what Jesus' invitation offered, a yoke which lightens the burdens of Torah. The healing of the demoniac in 12:22–23 functions to affirm the reality that the kingdom of heaven has come (12:28). But how does one enter the kingdom? It is not enough to listen to the teachings. Rather one must also act upon the teachings and do the will of the Father. This criterion is first mentioned in 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." This is reiterated in 12:50 where Jesus states, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." It is here where Matthew 13 picks up with Jesus' discourse on the nature of one's response the kingdom of heaven. For example, it is here where the issues concerning the types of response (the parable of the sower), judgment (the parable of the weeds), and the proper disposition (the parables of the hidden treasure and pearls) are presented for reflection upon one's own response to Jesus' mission.

Within this context, the Parable of the Sower in 13:1–9 functions as a rhetorical device to lure the reader into considering the efficacy of their response to Jesus' proclamation — his invitation to embrace his yoke, to embrace his interpretation of Torah. The parable employs an agricultural metaphor to engage the audience in a self-evaluation of the effectiveness of its response to Jesus' proclamation and ministry. This is achieved by the unusual image describing the manner in which the sower sows — seeds falling on the path, rocky soil, and among thorns — and the heightened tragic

description of the fate of the seeds. An agrarian society would already expect the first three scenarios to be unsuccessful and so the tragic ends for each stress the evident failure of each scenario. This heightened state of failure sets the tone for the success of the seeds sown on good soil.

The parable is introduced as the first of a series of parables Jesus tells the crowds who gathered by the sea. Unlike the Markan source (4:1–2), Matthew does not speak of Jesus teaching but rather telling parables (13:3). By avoiding the activity of teaching and having Jesus speak in parables, Matthew suggests that Jesus is proclaiming "what has been hidden from the foundation of the world" (13:35). This allusion to "these hidden things" in 11:25–27 reminds the audience of Jesus' identity as the true interpreter of Torah and makes the interpretation of Torah part of the thematic backdrop to understanding the parable and vice versa. The parable contributes to the theme of Jesus as the interpreter of Torah by having the audience reflect on the quality of its response to Jesus' invitation to take on his yoke, to take upon itself his interpretation of Torah (11:29).

In the parable, the sower is not a central image of the parable as the sower's marginal role is functional, to plant the seeds. In this case, the sower is an enabler and hence the true focus of the parable is the fate of the seeds in relation to where they were planted. However, the sower is important as the sower is the catalyst that sets the chain of events into motion. The sower is the sower of the seeds whose unorthodox approach calls the attention of the audience to the fate of the seeds. In view of 11:25–30, Jesus is the sower whose seed consists of his interpretation of Torah and where the four soils portray four alternative responses to Jesus' proclamation.

The core of the parable, vv. 4–8, portrays a detailed account of the fate of the seeds by offering four distinct scenarios. Each depicts an evolving degree in which life is possible. The first presents an environment where life is not possible as the seeds fall on a path. Verses 5–6 describe an environment where life is possible but it exists in a fragile state as the roots of the blooming seeds cannot find nutrients to be sustained. In v. 7 one encounters the possibility of life, but it is a life that exists in a hostile competitive environment. Here the seeds blossom but are choked by the surrounding thorns. In contrast stands v. 8 as its environment allows for the possibility of life as the seeds fell upon good soil. Also of notice is that three of the four scenarios include an element of hostility. The seeds on the path not only fell upon unfertile soil but are eaten by the birds. The seeds on the rocky ground have little nutrients as there is no depth to the soil and the plants have no roots, but their demise is brought upon by the sun. The seeds among thorns are choked by the competitive plant life. It is the seed on good soil that finds an environment free of hostility which allows for life to flourish and to bear fruit. Accordingly, one can heed Jesus' reproach set forth in 11:20–24 and embrace the kingdom as the fertile soil which brings forth grain (13:8), "the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields" (13:23). Or, one can reject the kingdom and face divine judgment.

To determine how Matt 11:25–30 can address the pending evangelization crisis, and following the experience-interpretation model, the gospel narrative will be approached as a specific mode of interpreting the symbols of Judaism in light of the experience of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of particular interest is Matthew's appropriation and reinterpretation of the symbols of Torah and Hokmah in understanding

Jesus and in response to the crisis generated by the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple.

The climax of Matthew's narrative is "the appearance of the Resurrected one to his disciples and in the missionary command."[159] In seeing Jesus as the resurrected one who bore the marks of the crucified one, the disciples understood Jesus in a new perspective.[160] The disciples came to see that in Jesus God was present in an unprecedented and superlative way.[161] For example, Jesus is greater than the Temple, Solomon, and Jonah, and nine times Matthew portrays people worshipping Jesus with approval (2:11, 8:2, 9:18, 14:33, 15:25, 20:20, 21:16, 28:9, 17).[162] The belief in the presence of God in Jesus is also accentuated by the *inclusio* for the whole gospel in 1:23 and 28:20 which notes that in Jesus God is truly present among them, first in Jesus of Nazareth's ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing, and then through his resurrection and the commandments he taught.[163]

In his capacity to make God present, the disciples came to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. As God's Son, Jesus is the faithful child of God who is fully faithful and obedient to God's will. It is an identity validated in Jesus' confrontation with Satan (4:1–11) where Jesus demonstrates that he is God's true son by obeying God's commandments.[164] In this manner, Jesus fulfills the righteousness of Torah and can be its true interpreter.[165] This authority of Jesus to interpret Torah is therefore shaped by the

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[159] Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 226.

[160] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 57.

[161] Mark Allen Powell, *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 76.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Johnson, *The Writings*, 171.

[164] Kingsbury, 42.

[165] Johnson, *The Writings*, 172–173.

Matthean community's claim of Jesus' divine sonship.[166] Consequently, the authority and universal lordship given to Jesus by God in his resurrection is reflected in the authority present in the earthly Jesus. For this reason, for Matthew "the demand made by the Risen One and that of the earthly Jesus correspond to each other."[167]

As Jesus' authority is of divine origin, Matthew presents Jesus' teaching as the "the binding exposition of the will of God."[168] The validity of Torah no longer rests in the Old Testament but in the person of Jesus and the authority bestowed upon him by God in his resurrection.[169] As such, "the entire Jewish law remains in full force for followers of Jesus, but he recognizes that this law must be interpreted to discern the true will of God."[170] Jesus' authority is exercised in his ability to bind and loosen in accordance to God's will. In rabbinic tradition these terms designate whether or not a specific legal expectation was applicable to a particular circumstance.[171] It is an authority inherited by the disciples in Matt 28:18–20 as they too have the authority to bind and loosen the demands of Torah.

This concern over the authority to interpret Torah reflects the religious crisis precipitated by the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple in 70 A.D. The loss of the Temple, central to Jewish identity and worship, created a need to reinterpret their religious symbols to make sense of the tragedy and to adapt to their changing reality. Likewise, it raised the question regarding who had the authority to carry out this reinterpretation and speak for the religious community given the diversity in Jewish sects

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[166] Schnelle, 230.
[167] Ibid., 231.
[168] Schnelle, 232.
[169] Ibid., 233.
[170] Powell, 80–81.
[171] Ibid., 78.

in the first century — e.g. Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and the Matthean community. In this division over the interpretation of the Old Testament and Judaic tradition, Matthew's response is clear. It is Jesus, the Son of God, who holds the authority to interpret Torah and speak for the people of God, a claim ratified by God raising Jesus from the dead and which permeates the gospel narrative. This divine authority in Jesus grounds Matthew's authority to reinterpret the symbolic world of Torah. Key to Matthew's argument for Jesus' authority is 11:25–30 where Matthew appropriates and reinterprets the Old Testament symbol of Lady Wisdom in constructing his argument for Jesus' role as the unique revealer of the Father's will whose yoke gives rest.

The myth of Lady Wisdom served as a means for the people of Israel to reflect on issues of revelation and theodicy prevalent in the Second Temple era.[172] The book of Job takes up the question of the origin of Lady Wisdom by asking, "But whence can wisdom be obtained, and where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12). Verse 13 answers the question by stating that wisdom is not found in mortals or in the land of the living. Furthermore, Job describes wisdom as hidden "from the eyes of any beast; from the birds of the air it is concealed" (28:21). It is God who understands wisdom and knows her place (28:22). The Book of Proverbs affirms wisdom's origin in God when it states in 8:22, "The Lord begot me, the first-born of his ways." Consequently, wisdom does not originate in human insight nor does it originate in nature. The origin of wisdom is God. However, wisdom is accessible to the created order and in this accessibility makes God's ways known to the world.

Wisdom is accessible because God takes the initiative to instruct the created order on God's ways. Proverbs 2:6 contends that "the Lord gives wisdom, from his mouth

[172] Deutsch, "Wisdom in Matthew", 16.

come knowledge and understanding." Sirach 24:2–3a speaks of wisdom as present "in the assembly of the Most High" and in this presence wisdom declares, "From the mouth of the Most High I came forth." In this manner, wisdom is accessible to all as divine utterance, an utterance which has made its dwelling in creation. Sirach 24:3b goes on to describe how God poured wisdom like mist on the earth. Moreover, God commands wisdom to dwell among the people of Israel in the Mosaic Law (24:8, 22). A similar point is made in Sirach 1:9, "It is the Lord; he created her, has seen her and taken note of her. He has poured her forth upon all his works, upon every living thing according to his bounty." Therefore, as God's divine utterance, wisdom is accessible for creation to know God's ways.

In its dwelling among the created order, wisdom functions as the self-expression of God's divine will. Proverbs 8:22 cited above notes that wisdom is the first-born of God's ways. Similarly in, Wisdom 9:9, the author argues that, as wisdom was with God at creation, wisdom understands what is pleasing to God and what is in agreement with God's commandments. It is wisdom that speaks with honesty, sincerity, and truth (Prov 8:6–8) and instructs in the understanding of God (Wis 8:4). For this reason, the deeds of the one who is guided by wisdom will be acceptable to God. In sum, wisdom's status as pre-existing before creation, along with its intimate relationship with God as God's divine utterance, gives wisdom its unique ability to reveal God's divine will.

The divine will calls for justice as the means to harvest the fruits of wisdom and for a person to attain life. Wisdom 1:1–4 calls on those who judge the world to love justice as perverse counsel separates a person from God just as evil and sin create conditions inhospitable for wisdom to dwell. The failure to act in justice leads to death as

verse 12 warns against courting death by one's "erring way of life." In contrast, the fruits of wisdom for those who act in justice are virtues such as moderation, prudence, justice and fortitude (Wis 8:7). But these fruits lead to a deeper reality, that in living justly the human person reaches that which God set out for humanity, being (Wis 1:14). In this sense wisdom is salvific as it saves the human person from death by allowing for the conditions for human life by means of justice and righteousness, "for he who finds me finds life, and wins favor from the Lord; but he who misses me harms himself; all who hate me love death" (Prov 8:35–36).

God's plan for salvation originates in the first story of creation, Gen 1:1–2:4b. Verses 1–3 consider the first act of creation to be light.[173] This implies that God's creative activity in this passage is not creation *ex nihilio*. "Instead, it was to take the dark and swirling chaos that was already there and to put it into life-supporting, fruitful order."[174] Then, by divine utterance, God creates light, and the light is good. This proclamation of creation being good appears seven times in this passage. The Hebrew bwj can be translated as good in character and value or as moral good. It thus refers to creation's "capability to respond to the Creator's goodness" by adhering to an ideal plan for righteousness and justice.[175] This insight suggests that God's divine utterance brings salvation from chaos by establishing a divine order. It is a divine order uttered by God through wisdom and codified in Torah. For this reason, Sirach affirms that if one desires wisdom they are to keep the commandments (Sir 1:23).

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[173] See W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 15.
[174] Ibid., 15–16.
[175] Andre LaCoque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 10.

Psalm 1 expresses the joy of this salvation when it proclaims, "Happy are those who do not follow the counsel of the wicked . . . Rather, the law of the Lord is their joy; God's law they study day and night" (1:1–2). The psalm then moves to compare the person who studies the law with the image of a tree standing near a stream of water (1:3). Just as the water gives life to the tree, so too does the law give life and salvation to the one who studies Torah. As for those who reject Torah, they are like chaff driven by the wind whose way leads to ruin (1:4–6). Psalm 36:2–4 elaborates on this detrimental outcome.

> Sin directs the heart of the wicked; their eyes are closed to the fear of God. For they live with the delusion; their guilt will not be known and hated. Empty and false are words of their mouth; they have ceased to be wise and do good.

It is in their rejection of the fear of God and in the absence of the dwelling presence of divine wisdom that the wicked live in delusion. As they do not know their sin they are unaware of how their actions lead to separation from God, the source of life. But for those who study Torah, the ways of the Lord as revealed by wisdom offer happiness, life, and favor from the Lord (Prov 8:33–35).

This divine order, however, is contingent on the capacity of the human person to respond to God in obedience.[176] Wisdom 9:2–3 speaks of the human vocation to rule creation by "governing the world in holiness and justice, and to render judgment in integrity of heart." And so the world finds itself in a delicate state for the failure of humanity to follow the divine order results in the reintroduction of chaos into the world. This is the case in Genesis 3 where as a result of the human disobedience to God's command chaos returns to the created order, a return resulting in death, evil, and suffering. What follows in the Genesis narrative, and beyond, is the unfolding of God's

[176] Ibid., 6.

divine plan to save humanity by bringing order to the chaos, of which in Judaism Torah is its center piece. Torah is thus wisdom's revelation of the divine will which offers salvation by bringing order to chaos and allowing for organized life to emerge from the disorganized chaos.[177] Given this dynamic between wisdom and law, Sirach invites his readers to come to his school to receive instruction and to submit to the yoke of Lady Wisdom (51:23) who, moved by human affliction, reaches out to humanity to offer her instruction (Prov 8); an instruction Sirach encourages the reader to accept (51:26).

It is this narrative myth of Lady Wisdom which Matthew appropriates and reinterprets in 11:25–30 as he wrestles to understand Jesus and the symbolic world of Torah in light of Jesus' resurrection. In this pericope Jesus has taken the place of hypostasized wisdom.[178] As wisdom incarnate, Jesus is the unique revealer of the Father as "no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him" (27). This relationship is marked by the verb "to know."[179] The verb epignosko "connotes total unity of will between the Father and the Son."[180] In this unity, the Father elects the Son and authorizes the Son to represent the Father in the world. The Son acknowledges the election by living in complete fellowship with the Father by giving the Father perfect obedience. The result of this relationship is that the Father entrusts the Son with divine authority. Consequently, "Jesus Messiah, then, is the divine Son who speaks and acts on the authority of God, his Father."[181] With this authority Jesus now reveals the euvdoki,a of God to "the

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[177] Ibid., 4.
[178] Hans D. Betz, "Logion of the Easy Yoke and of Rest (Matt 11:28-30)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967) : no. 1, 22.
[179] Kingsbury, 43.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.

kopiw/ntej and pefortisme,noi which means, according to Matthew's understanding, those who are oppressed with the burden of the Pharisaic law."[182]

To those who labor and are burdened by the Pharisaic interpretation of Torah Jesus extends an invitation to (1) come to him and find rest, and (2) take his yoke (11:28–30). For Matthew, Christ's "promise of rest is the fulfillment of the Messianic rest typified by the OT Sabbath."[183] It is characterized by "material abundance, social justice, harmony between persons and animals, and peace and rest."[184] As an eschatological promise it looks to a realized eschatology in the future, but it is also in the present as in Jesus the rule of heaven has drawn near.[185] This rest is attained by embracing Jesus' yoke which consists of his interpretation of Torah.[186] Since for Matthew Jesus is the revealer of the Father's euvdoki,a Jesus reveals God's true purpose and divine order as stipulated in Torah. Therefore, Jesus' Messianic yoke offers "the restful assurance of redemption through attachment to him."[187]

Jesus' yoke is easy and light because he claims to do what the Law could not, to offer the rest of Messianic redemption to which the law and the Sabbath point to.[188] Hence, while wisdom is life-giving and leads to rest it does not preclude suffering or severe discipline in service of wisdom.[189] Jesus' yoke is easy, not because it allows one to escape the difficulties of this world nor because it is ethical relativism, but rather it is easy because it enables one to do the weightier things of the law — judgment, mercy, and

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[182] Betz, 22.

[183] Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus' Rest and the Sabbath" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 22 (1984) : no. 2, 290.

[184] Ibid., 298.

[185] Betz, 23.

[186] M. Jack Snuggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 106.

[187] Bacchiocchi, 301.

[188] Ibid., 303.

[189] Snuggs, 108.

fidelity (Matt 23:23). In this capacity, the yoke of Jesus truly leads to life and offers assurance of a person's right relationship with God.

Carrying the yoke of Christ demands a life of discipleship committed to learning that Jesus is "prau<j and *tapeino,j te kardia*" and it necessitates that the disciple model Jesus' meekness and humble heart.[190] This suggests that a person comes to know God in the context of discipleship to Jesus.[191] Consequently, one knows God's will and purpose and responds to it through Jesus' teaching. Furthermore, as the referent for Lady Wisdom is now the person of Jesus, discipleship and the living out of Torah are now understood as relational.[192] In this capacity a person enters into relationship with Jesus and becomes a member of Jesus' family by doing the will of the Father as expressed in Jesus' interpretation of Torah. For Matthew this was the deficiency in the Pharisaic interpretation of Torah, "their teaching lacked the context of relationship and solidarity."[193] This relational dynamic to Jesus' yoke demands an ethical response to living Torah; but it is a response where Jesus remains with the disciple bearing the yoke.

Conclusion

This thesis took on the task of addressing the dichotomy present in implementing the post Second Vatican Council vision for evangelization. The hope of this study is to determine a point of departure to reconciling the division between the missiological approaches of the Catholic Right and the Catholic Left that burden the members of the Catholic Church. It is a starting point that can also promote the holistic post-Vatican II vision for evangelization. To this end, the experience-interpretation model was applied to

[190] Betz, 23.
[191] Deutsch, "Wisdom in Matthew", 47.
[192] Celia Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom and the Easy Yoke: Wisdom, Torah, and Discipleship in Matthew 11:25-30* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 132.
[193] Ibid., 137.

a reading of Matthew 11:25–30 as a hermeneutical model that can accomplish this task. The findings from this reading of Matthew 11:25–30 fall into two categories: (1) insights gained from the application of the model and (2) insights gained from the exegetical reading of the Matthean passage.

The experience-interpretation model permits the reader to approach the writings of the New Testament as specific modes of interpreting the symbolic world of Judaism in light of the experience of the risen Christ. This construal of the New Testament as the outcome of the reinterpretation of the symbolic world demonstrates that a religious community's symbolic world offers a justifiable means to express its encounter with God. Likewise, it supports the Catholic missiological outlook which considers that as the Gospel transforms the culture, the culture provides the symbols for which to convey the Gospel. This contextualization of the Gospel allows for the Christian faith to be relevant to, and address, the contemporary setting of Christian communities and shows how important contextualization is to reading the bible for contemporary interpreters.

The experience-interpretation model also demonstrates how the application of the historical-critical method can assist a contemporary audience to relate to a biblical text despite the chronological distance. Previously it was noted that the Matthean community found itself, not only attempting to make sense of its symbolic world as a result of encountering the risen Christ, but also as a consequence of the First Jewish War which ended with the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple. This event sparked internal and external divisions in the Matthean community. For instance, Matthew 23 reflects the conflict which existed between the leadership of the Matthean community and the contemporary rabbinic leadership: "The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on

the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example" (Matt 23:2–3). Matthew 10:34–36 serve as an example of the internal conflict, "I have come to bring not peace but the sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother . . . and one's enemies will be those of his household." Though the causes for the divisions are several, one is of particular interest. Divisions arose over the manner in which to interpret the Jewish sacred writings and tradition in light of new historical circumstances. Today's contemporary reader shares similar experiences — genocide, war, the exploitation of imperial powers in the form of political and economic systems, technological advancement, and globalization. And like the Matthean community, the members of today's Church argue over the best approach to interpret the Christian sacred writings and traditions in light of, and in the hopes to address, these historical realities. This sense of a shared lived experience, made possible by employing the historical-critical method, creates an affinity between the ancient text and its contemporary reader.

The exegetical reading of Matthew 11:25–30 served to identify key features of the pericope that provided insight into the dichotomy in evangelization. First, the emphasis on Jesus as the unique revealer of the Father's will reminds the Catholic Left that at the center of the Christian faith is Jesus of Nazareth who God raised from the dead and exalted as Lord, a belief not grounded in historical data but in the religious encounter with the risen Christ. To forfeit this belief is to strike at the very heart of the Christian faith and identity. On this matter, the following thought is worth reflection.

> Conversations across religions need not, and should not, end with all participants proclaiming an ultimate unity of belief. Such an exercise only waters down both

> traditions into a bland universalism that, in an attempt to be inoffensive, winds up offending everyone.[194]

The same holds true for ecumenical dialogue as "ecumenism is best served when denominational and theological traditions speak to each other from within their deeply held commitments, rather than when they ignore or suppress those commitments for the sake of a false communion."[195]

Second, the critical reading on Jesus' invitation to rest to those who labor and are burdened speaks to the Catholic Right's effort to maintain the status quo. To take Jesus' yoke is to be instruments of justice. To take Jesus' yoke is to stand against the "ways of the wicked" and strive to make the reign of God present by living the commandments. This commitment to promoting the divine order lightens the burdens of the oppressed. Taking the yoke is a commitment to a personal transformation by the members of the Body of Christ whose renewal and reconciliation with God and others alters the social, political, and economic order as they reflect the divine will.

In closing, the yield of the experience-interpretation model demonstrates the model's ability to engage in a critical reading of the Bible while still addressing the needs of the Christian community. The fruits of this approach from the reading of Matthew 11:25–30 also allow for starting points to bridge the dichotomy between the Catholic Right and the Catholic Left in the matter of Roman Catholic evangelization.

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[194] Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 6.

[195] Johnson, *The Future of Catholic Biblical*, 18.

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