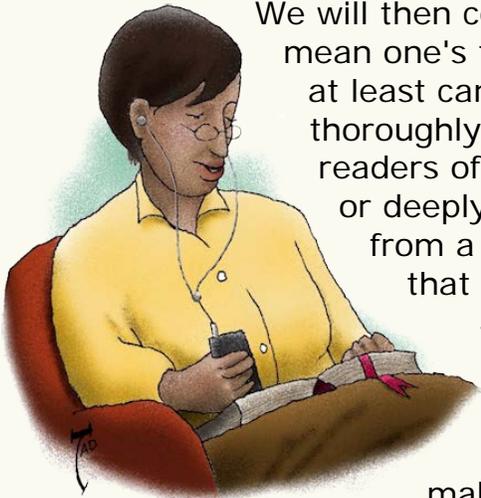


## Scholarship & the Bible

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How does a community of faith ensure that readers of the Bible correctly grasp the significance of what they read?

To answer this, we need to be clear about what we mean by *Bible* and *community*. From there, we can explore what happens when anyone interprets any sort of text. This will open the question of *hermeneutics*—the study of the methods used for interpretations. Examples will be given of two such hermeneutics typically used by readers of the Bible, a hermeneutics of *inspiration* and a hermeneutics of *author engagement*.



We will then consider the reality of one's *horizon*. By this we mean one's total outlook on life—everything a person knows or at least can ask about. We will describe how one's horizon thoroughly affects the writers, the interpreters, and the readers of the Bible. One's horizon can be deeply mistaken, or deeply well-grounded, or a bit of both. When one moves from a mistaken horizon to a grounded horizon, we say that a certain *conversion* has occurred.

To ensure that horizons are brought into the open, we will propose a *dialectical* hermeneutic focused on asking scholars to reveal their horizons in a forum of mutual engagement. The purpose is to make it plain which horizons are based on conversion and which are not. Here is where we find how communities of faith ensure that readers of the Bible correctly understand the significance of what they read. In brief, faith communities explore together the biblical invitations to faith in a forum where basic horizons are brought to light. Here, the horizons of those who most closely understand and accept the biblical invitations will become living, in-person invitations to others whose horizons are more limited. We will conclude with an example of how Bible readers might use all three hermeneutics--inspirational, author-engagement, and dialectical—for grasping the significance of what they read. <sup>1</sup>

### The Bible & Community

The Bible feels like a book. But it is better described as a library of 46 Jewish and 27 Christian books. The Jewish collection was written over a span of at

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<sup>1</sup> This treatment of biblical interpretation depends mainly on the works of Bernard Lonergan. Since his writings on biblical interpretation appear in a number of different contexts, this treatment organizes them under the question of how religious communities ensure that readers of the Bible will grasp what is truly significant and avoid misinterpretations.

least 1,000 years, and the Christian collection a span of about 100 years.<sup>2</sup> Each book is an expression of the religious faith, hope, and love of certain communities.<sup>3</sup> Yet none of its authors anticipated the publication of a Bible as a single volume containing the most prized books. So we might first ask *why* these books were written and then combined.

A community is not simply a collection of individuals. It is an achievement of common meanings (understandings and beliefs) and common values (priorities and practices).<sup>4</sup> Communities that intend to outlive their members know that this achievement is not a permanent accomplishment but an ongoing effort both to preserve its foundational, originating achievements and to faithfully augment those achievements to deal with new demands. Members express these meanings and values in artworks, social institutions, rituals, and, most telling, in their deeds. But to preserve and share them, they rely on writings. Foundational writings present to later communities an originating community's origins and visions; augmentations are written to provide commentary, interpretation, and adaptations to meet the needs of later times.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each realized the importance of identifying certain works as foundational or *canonical*<sup>5</sup>—those writings officially approved as being reliable expressions of the originating, unwritten beliefs, priorities and practices of their various communities. These are the communities who lived their religion and passed it forward—first through example and oral tradition and eventually in writing. Judaism has its Hebrew

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond E. Brown and Robert Collins, "Canonicity" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. Brown et al. (Prentice-Hall, 1990) 1036-38 and 1045.

<sup>3</sup> At least seven distinct Christian communities arose after the death of the last apostle, each conveying a unique vision of salvation and church and each associated with certain New Testament works: the pastoral letters of Paul (1-2 Timothy, Titus), letters to Colossians and Ephesians, Luke/Acts, the gospel and letters of John in combination with Revelation, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and a combination of Matthew and the letter of James. The Gospel according to Mark is strong evidence of yet another community, but its content does not indicate any particular difference from Matthew and Luke, who depend on Mark. No doubt other communities existed with at least minor differences between them. See Raymond Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (Paulist Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> The material on community and meaning is drawn from Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Herder & Herder, 1972), chap. 3, "Meaning."

<sup>5</sup> The canon of the Hebrew Bible was fixed between about 150-250 CE, and the canon of the New Testament was fixed about 150-200 CE, but disagreement continues today whether a few works belong to these canons. See Raymond E. Brown and Robert Collins, "Canonicity" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. Brown et al. (Prentice-Hall, 1990) part 35: 1040. The Quran was completed by Muhammad in 632 CE; a canonical version was promulgated about 650.

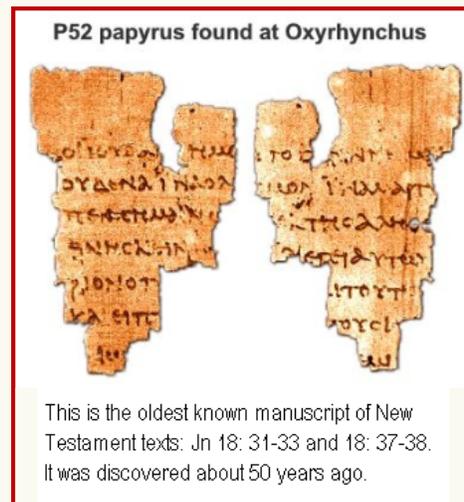
Bible. Christianity has an Old Testament and a New Testament. <sup>6</sup> Islam regards the Quran as foundational while still honoring the revelations contained in the Christian Bible. <sup>7</sup> The writers of these works intended to say something reliable and liberating about God's dealings with humans and human responses to God's initiatives. Christian communities regarded their works also as proclamations of good news to the downtrodden everywhere in the world and as invitations to partake in their understandings, beliefs, priorities, practices, and good company in the struggle of living for God's Kingdom. <sup>8</sup>

### **The Problem of Interpretation**

Efforts to interpret the Bible have challenged readers from many perspectives. The faithful may be inspired by ideas quite unrelated to what an author meant and to anyone else's interpretation. Jews, Christians and Muslims have modified or disregarded many of the standards of morality and principles of authority evident in the Bible. Some have interpreted the Bible in ways that fragmented their communities, alienated believers and unbelievers, and even justified hatred, oppression, and killing.

Moreover, interpretations of what scriptural authors actually meant are not equally plausible. The available evidence can be skimpy, piecemeal, or badly translated. We have no originals of any biblical text. All we have are copies and translations, many of which are themselves copies or translations.

Earliest copies used only capital letters and used punctuation marks mainly



<sup>6</sup> Hebrew portions are called the *Tanakh* by Jews and called the *Old Testament* and the *Hebrew Bible* by Christians. The present account will follow general usage and speak of *Bible* as the combined version and of *Hebrew Bible* when referring specifically to the *Tanakh*.

<sup>7</sup> "We (Muslims) believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you (Jews & Christians); our Allah and your Allah is One" (Quran 29: 46)." O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of Allah anything but the truth. Christ Jesus, the son of Mary was but a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit created by him. So believe in Allah and His Messengers" (Quran 4: 171). Note that while expression "People of the Book" applies to Muslims because the Quran is a book on which Islam is founded, it does not strictly apply to Judaism and Christianity because all biblical writings originated in oral traditions.

<sup>8</sup> The focus on the Kingdom in the present account follows Gerhard Lohfink's *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted. Who He Was* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier / Liturgical Press, 2012).

indicate accented syllables, not ends of sentences or independent clauses; many have no spaces between letters. <sup>9</sup> Scribes are not immune to transcription errors, and translators must select words in the translated language that only approximate the meanings in the original.

Yet even reliable copies, accurate translations, and faithful augmentations can be interpreted differently. Here is where ordinary believers rely on scholars to keep things on track. Scholars study ancient languages, archeological findings and geographies. They also study how the human mind relies on imagination, emotion, intelligence, truth, responsibility and loving in many different ways. In their study of biblical texts and augmentations, these studies help them ensure that the religious message is properly understood.

Yet again, scholars often come up with different interpretations because they use different methods of interpretation. If authors of foundational texts had one clear meaning in mind, by what methods might later readers of any culture make reasonable judgments that one scholar's interpretation is better than another's? And what methods might rightly discern among different commentaries meant for later-emerging cultures?

The question of methods of interpretation is the specialty of *hermeneutics*. <sup>10</sup> The associated word *exegesis* is about *doing* the interpretation. So an *exegete* is someone who interprets texts, using some sort of hermeneutic.

## **A Brief History of Hermeneutics**

The word *hermeneutics* did not appear until the mid-1600s CE, referring mainly to biblical interpretation. <sup>11</sup> But interest in methods of interpreting the Bible dates back to Jewish oral tradition beginning roughly from the construction of the Second Temple (c. 515 BCE). <sup>12</sup> In the New Testament, a

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<sup>9</sup> "Sentence punctuation was invented several centuries after the time of Christ. The oldest copies of both the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament are written with no punctuation" (Michael W. Palmer). See <http://greek-language.com/grklinguist/?p=657>

<sup>10</sup> *Hermeneutics* comes from the Greek, *hermeneuein*, meaning "to interpret." It was associated with the Greek god Hermes, who is credited with the discovery of language and writing.

<sup>11</sup> The earliest appearance of "hermeneutics" as a book title is J. C. Dannhauer's 1654 work, *Sacred Hermeneutics: The Method for Interpreting Sacred Writings*. (*Hermeneutic sacra sive methodus exponendarum sacrarum litterarum*.) Since then, the question of a method for interpretation has been extended to ordinary narratives, juridical texts, mystical writing, poetry and the fine arts. It has also looked to philosophy for the underlying structures of language, symbols, and understanding, on which to build methods that are true to the workings of human consciousness. See Raymond E. Brown and Sandra M. Schneiders, "Hermeneutics," *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1146-1165.

<sup>12</sup> Material on biblical hermeneutics is largely taken the sources already mentioned in the *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* and from Robert Goldenberg, "Hebrew Scriptures in

prominent hermeneutic is *prophecy fulfillment*—where authors interpreted Hebrew Scriptures as pointing toward the Christ/Messiah sent from God for the salvation of Israel and ultimately the world. **13** At the same time, New Testament authors shaped the gospel message according to their various understandings of how God's salvation in Christ affects history, of the sort of church needed to carry forward the legacy of Christ, and of the needs of the various communities for whom they wrote.

From New Testament times until the 18th century, believers generally followed an *inspirational hermeneutic*, which seeks meanings directly relevant to religious living or supportive of religious teachings. Unlike the Quran, whose author Muslims accept as God, biblical works were authored by writers who patently regard their written sources as somewhat adaptable to their present needs for inspiration, with no abiding requirement to establish what their sources actually had in mind. Many believers in later generations saw no problem with this approach.

We may describe a method that focuses on what authors had in mind as an *author-engagement hermeneutic*. A major breakthrough toward this method appeared in 1725 with Giambattista Vico's *The New Science*. **14** In the course of opposing Descartes' emphasis on a quasi-mathematical certitude in every discipline, he proposed that our understanding of particular historical periods, cultures, languages, and persons belongs not to the natural sciences pioneered by Newton and Galileo but to a new and distinct discipline. His *new science* incorporated methods we now call *scholarship*. One effect of scholarship on biblical hermeneutics was to widen its focus beyond what inspires and toward understanding the historical mindsets, priorities, and intentions of particular biblical authors and their communities. **15**

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Early, Post-Biblical Judaism" and Elizabeth A. Clark, "Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church," *The Oxford Study Bible*, eds. M. Jack Suggs *et al.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 122-28 and 129-140, respectively. In the first and second centuries CE, Hebrew scholars recognized two hermeneutics for reading Scripture: one as *plain-sense* texts regarding Jewish beliefs, history, customs, laws and rituals; and the other as *midrash*—rabbinic commentaries on Jewish tradition loosely tied to Scripture and often involving "extra interpretations virtually without limit" (Goldenberg, 125-26).

**13** For examples of the prophecy-fulfillment hermeneutic, see Matthew 1:23, 2:15–18, 3:3, 21:42; Mark 1:2–3, 4:12; Luke 3:4–6, 4:18–21, 22:37; John 2:17, 12:15; 1 Corinthians 1:19; Ephesians 4:8–10; and Hebrews 8:7–13.

**14** Vico's *The New Science* first appeared in 1725, a revision in 1730, and a more finished work in 1744. See "Giambattista Vico" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/vico>. Vico's "new science" was eventually referred to as "scholarship." Where science studies laws and probabilities applicable to *sets* of things/events, scholarship studies meanings that are *unique* to specific persons and times.

**15** Roman Catholic acceptance of this principle is well-documented in the Vatican II document "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," which states, "the interpreter of

Another relevant development regards authorship. Again, just as Vico regarded Homer not as a poetic genius but as a talented voice of the vision of a community of his fellow Greeks, so nineteenth-century historians came to regard all historical documents as products more of a certain community, and less of isolated authors, even when an individual author's name is attached. This is true in spades for biblical works. Some of the letters attributed to Paul are clearly his own, but not all. And the vast majority of other biblical works are essentially *redactions*—compilations, rearrangements, and augmentations of works written by anonymous yet deeply wise and holy authors. <sup>16</sup> Essential to historical consciousness is the realization that a final redactor's work is first deeply influenced by the faith of a community and then exposed to the critical eyes of current and later communities. Since authors of specific works may be more or less enlightened by faith, religious leaders who believe themselves to be more enlightened will naturally make efforts to exclude from catechetical and liturgical readings the works of the less enlightened. The point here is that biblical works are community work-products. In this sense, an "author-engagement" hermeneutic will be an engagement with a certain community of faith through the lens of a final redactor. It is important to keep this in mind when we speak of biblical "authors." <sup>17</sup>

## ***Two Kinds of Scriptural Hermeneutics***

An inspirational hermeneutic and an author-engagement hermeneutic each presents unique problems.

### **Inspirational Hermeneutics**

Following an inspirational hermeneutic, believers read the Bible for encouragement, insight, and moral guidance. Their purpose is to welcome or confirm a conversion of heart to God. They assume the Bible is reliable; they speak of it as the Word of God, which presumably cannot be erroneous. Many regard biblical authors as inspired, and some regard their words as

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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." See "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation / *Dei Verbum*", [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council), no. 12.

<sup>16</sup> For example, scholars have identified three different communities authoring the Book of Genesis, and three authoring the Book of Deuteronomy. On authorship, see Raymond F. Collins, "Canonicity" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1051. He notes that the Roman Catholic Church no longer has an official position on the identity of the writer of any biblical work. On the communal "authorship" of biblical works see, in the same book, the same author's views of "Inspiration," p. 1032, para. 60.

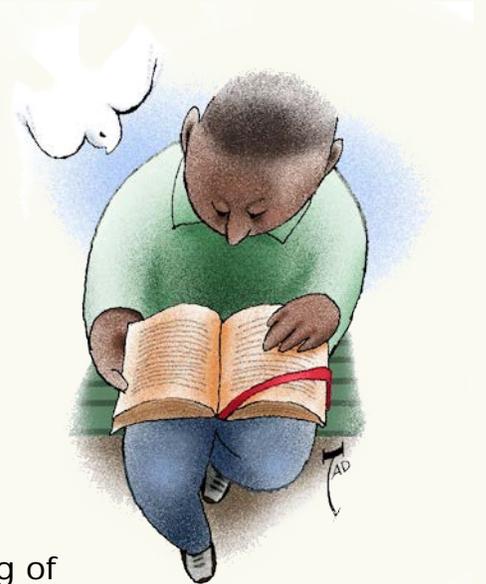
<sup>17</sup> It is also important to recognize that the notion of "inspiration" by the Holy Spirit cannot be applied exclusively to any single writer or final redactor of a scriptural text.

dictated by God or God's Holy Spirit or angels. Believers also augment the significance of biblical texts through commentaries, inspirational writings, homilies, and theological works.

It is important to note here the difference between *symbolic* meanings and *linguistic* meanings. All scriptures carry *symbolic* meanings insofar as they arise from and evoke religious *imagination*, *emotion*, and *hope*. **18** Some also carry *linguistic* meanings insofar as they arise from and evoke *understanding* and *acceptance* of certain *truths of faith*. **19**

But what gives readers confidence that they correctly understand the *linguistic* meanings of the scriptural words? Meanings are not what written words and dictionary definitions mysteriously contain. **20** To understand *meaning*, we should look to the gerund: meaning is what we are doing when we *mean* something. We are using words instrumentally, as media awaiting the effort of a hearer or reader to understand what we mean.

Moreover, we first need to reach some understanding of what certain writers meant before passing judgment on whether our understanding is correct, and misunderstanding is an ever-present possibility. To rely only on personal inspiration to confirm our understanding risks taking meanings the authors deliberately avoided and missing the meanings they hoped to convey. This is compounded by the fact that all scriptures were written in a language and for cultures quite different from our own. At the same time, authors of the majority of texts intended that their meanings were more or less protean and so allowed for a certain range of interpretations and applications to the lives of later readers. This is



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**18** The symbolic meaning of sacred texts shows in the Muslim outrage against persons who burn a copy of the Quran. It also showed in the Middle Ages in the Christian respect for talismanic properties of highly adorned Bibles and lectionaries. See Bernard Meehan, *The Book of Kells: An Illustrated Introduction to the Manuscript in Trinity College Dublin* (Thames & Hudson, 1994), 33.

**19** For the differences between symbolic and linguistic meanings, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 64-73. Among Muslim scholars there is no debate about the Quran's symbolic meanings but much debate of about its linguistic meanings. Muslim debates continue today whether augmentations of the words of God may be not only allowed but required, particularly in light of increasing global concern about democracy, human rights, and the equality of women.

**20** The assumption that words *contain* meanings implies that linguistic meanings may be grasped by earnest looking or hearing. Although symbolic meanings may be grasped in this manner, linguistic meanings are grasped by earnest attention, intelligent questions, and reasonable verifications.

strongly evident in the Psalms, less so in the Gospels, and minimally in 1-2 Kings.

### **Author-Engagement Hermeneutics**

An author-engagement hermeneutic involves understanding what authors actually meant. Since the writers of biblical works used commonsense, undefined words, what they meant naturally allowed for a certain range of meanings among members of the communities who first read these works. An even broader range of meanings emerges as later generations try to live their faith in cultures unforeseen by the authors. For many passages, scholars are content to assert what an author certainly did not mean.

The focus on what the authors meant also undercuts the familiar assumption that they meant to be accurate about what happened. This assumption may appear logical: Scripture is from God, and God does not lie. But complete factual accuracy is not what the authors meant, nor must God's word be restricted to statements of fact. The idea that any written account of past events should say "what really happened" emerged only in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century CE in the pioneering work of Leopold von Ranke.<sup>21</sup> It was not a strict rule for scriptural authors, whose overriding purpose was to give witness that God is active, trustworthy, forgiving, encouraging, and healing. And while most biblical descriptions of historical events have connections to real events, the authors freely modified dates, places, and even persons when it made for a more compelling witness to faith.

Paradoxically, nonbelievers tend naturally toward an author-engagement hermeneutic. They regard Scripture not as true, reliable, or personally inspiring but only as *evidence* of what some people, some place, believed long ago. The idea that God's Spirit or some angel guided a writer's hand is dismissed as fantasy. The reality is just ordinary people writing things down. If they are inspired, they are motivated just like the rest of us: optimally by a genuine concern for inviting others into the light of truth but necessarily dependent on cultural prisms that bend that light.

Still, among both believers and nonbelievers, even an earnest author-engagement may remain one-way. Those who focus strictly on the visible evidence of texts to understand what an authoring community meant will overlook the invisible evidence of what they personally feel and imagine as

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<sup>21</sup> In an appendix to von Ranke's *History of Latin and Teutonic Nations* (1824), he states, "You have reckoned that history ought to judge the past and to instruct the contemporary world as to the future. The present attempt does not yield to that high office. It will merely tell how it really was." See [http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/history/historian/Leopold\\_von\\_Ranke.html](http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/history/historian/Leopold_von_Ranke.html).

they read—and such feelings and images are exactly what the authors hoped to instill. <sup>22</sup>

### ***The Self-Correcting Process of Learning***

Moreover, those who follow an author-engagement hermeneutic can have remarkably different assumptions on what goes on in the mind of anyone attempting an interpretation—in the authors they study, in fellow exegetes studying the same authors, and in themselves. Here is where the work of Bernard Lonergan helps clarify things. In *Insight* (1957) he leads the reader to discover how the mind learns anything. In *Method in Theology* (1972) he identifies the relationships between the many tasks of theology, including the tasks of interpreting texts, the grounds that justify any interpretation, and the winnowing process by which these interpretations become part of religious doctrine. He is not proposing his own newly-devised methods but rather his own discoveries and analyses of the methods proper to inquiring minds. The observations that follow here are based on his work. <sup>23</sup>

If the goal of an author-engagement hermeneutic is to establish the most plausible interpretations of what authors had in mind, we might first ask, What is common to all interpretations of texts, sacred or otherwise? Three observations are now in order:

All interpretations are acts of learning.

All learning is asking and answering questions about experience.

The experience of reading texts raises questions not only about what the authors meant but also about is happening to oneself.

### **The Role of Questions**

A concrete example will illustrate the key role played by questions in how we naturally interpret texts:

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<sup>22</sup> Examples of a two-way author engagement can be found in today's movie reviews. Critics generally comment not only on what they view but also on how viewing the movie affected their imagination and emotions.

<sup>23</sup> This treatment of the process of interpreting texts is taken mainly from Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, chap. 7, "Interpretation" and chap. 9, "Dialectic."

In the film, *Bridges of Madison County*,<sup>24</sup> an Iowa farmer, Richard Johnson, and his wife, Francesca, have died. They are survived by two grown children, Michael and Carolyn, who are both in the middle of marriage problems. In her will, Francesca asks that they have her body cremated and her ashes cast into the river under the Roseman Covered Bridge. They are surprised at her request. Michael thinks it means nothing; Carolyn suspects it means everything.

While digging through her effects, they discover photographs and a diary that astonish them. Years back, while they and their father were away for a long weekend attending a state fair, a stranger stopped at the farm to ask directions from Francesca. His name is Robert Kincaid, a wanderer at heart on assignment from *National Geographic* to photograph the many covered bridges in Madison County. Polite small-talk gradually circles around and deeper into life, commitment, work, desires, hopes, and disappointments. They both love Yeats. She touches his shoulder. He fixes a fence. They have dinner—for her, the first dinner for as long as she can remember where conversation is alive and engaging. He sleeps on the couch for the night. Next morning she goes with him to photograph the Roseman Bridge. The rest you know or can easily guess.

Four days later, the husband and kids will be returning. Robert must leave. He asks her to go with him, and she deeply wants to. Happiness beckons her far beyond what she ever dreamed, but so does a profound guilt should she leave her family. One commentator notes that the climax of the movie is not in a bed but in a truck. Shortly after her family returns, Francesca and her husband are in town for groceries. From their pickup truck, she sees Robert leaving the general store on his way to leave the state. She puts her hand to the door handle, eager to leap out, but she doesn't move. She weighs the value of carrying through on family promises against pursuing happiness for herself. She carries through on her promises.



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<sup>24</sup> Released in 1995, starring Meryl Streep and Clint Eastwood. Based on Robert James Waller's book by the same title.

Notice how Michael and Carolyn interpret her diary. Since interpretations are acts of learning, they will ask and answer questions about this evidence. Here Lonergan identifies four kinds of questions:

1. The objects: What are the things she is writing about?

Mainly, Francesca is writing about her relationship with Robert. But who is this man? What was he up to?

2. The words: What do her words mean to her?

What did she mean by writing, "In that moment, everything I knew to be true about myself up until then was gone. I was acting like another woman, yet I was more myself than ever before."

3. The author: Why did she write these words?

Why was she so taken by Robert? Why would she even think of leaving her own family? Why did she keep her deepest hopes secret? What inspired her to keep a diary in the first place?

4. Themselves: What do her words mean to us?

What happened to us when we read her words? What puzzled us? What questions have occurred to us? What insights, realizations, and values have we gained? What sort of progeny are we?

### **Self-Understanding**

This fourth question needs some amplification. Commonly, we think of exegetes as experts in understanding texts. But Lonergan draws attention to the fact that exegetes must also be open to understanding themselves. After all, authors write to influence readers, and intelligent readers would seek an integral understanding of all aspects of reading a text.<sup>25</sup> Thus a proper author-engagement hermeneutic is a two-way street. The priorities evident in authors can raise questions about the reader's priorities. Michael and Carolyn likely wonder: Knowing we would find her diary, what did she hope would happen to us as we read it? Is the pursuit of my personal happiness really the most important thing in life? To save my marriage, indeed, to carry forward my inheritance of Mom's heart, is it up to me to become a different sort of person?

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<sup>25</sup> Lonergan notes that these "four aspects are aspects of a single coming to understand." *Method in Theology*, 155.

Lonergan also notes that an author may even challenge one's image of what the entire drama of human living is about—a challenge particularly evident in classic works. Should Michael and Carolyn leaf through Francesca's copy of Yeats' poetry, they might find this passage heavily underlined:

Then nowise worship dusty deeds,  
nor seek, for this is also sooth,  
to hunger fiercely after truth,  
lest all thy toiling only breeds  
new dreams, new dreams; there is no truth  
saving in thine own heart. <sup>26</sup>

In reading this, it is Yeats who now engages them. With their mother and Robert they inherit Yeats' vision regarding good deeds, the search for truth, and hopeful dreams as compared to the human heart. Some will recognize how Yeats' words express a world view that has been a part of the very tradition in which they were raised and which has long shaped how they read anything. Others will realize that Yeats' words upset assumptions in their inherited world-views that have long shaped their reading; they will feel invited toward a genuineness longed-for by countless other readers of Yeats. In the same way, exegetes who endeavor to deepen their understanding of Scripture often take on ever deeper explorations of themselves along paths well-known to believers.

In all these efforts, Michael and Carolyn follow no steps for interpreting texts. They ask these questions randomly and gropingly—the manner natural to all human efforts to understand one another. They circle around various plausible answers to these questions and to whatever new questions come to mind. They won't be satisfied until they establish some highly plausible and interlocking answers.

### **A Legitimate Method.**

Lonergan names this method *the self-correcting process of learning*. The process is familiar to everyone. When we try to understand any issue or person, we start with some provisional idea; we try to support it with evidence; we discover that the provisional idea needs refining; we check the refined idea against the evidence; and so on, spiraling through provisional and increasingly refined ideas until one seems to be fully supported by all available evidence.

Regarding the interpretation of texts, you start with some initial understanding of the object, the words, the author, and yourself, along with questions about things that puzzle you. You consider a hypothesis about what some passage means. You check it against what you understand of

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<sup>26</sup> From William Butler Yeats' "The Song of the Happy Shepherd."

other passages, of other authors on the same topic, and of your own horizon. If it satisfies your questions, you move forward; if not, you self-correct by considering a different hypothesis. Gradually, by circling through questions, hypotheses, validation, and provisional answers, you may well come to a comprehensive understanding. You consider it comprehensive when your understanding ties it all together in a way that no new questions occur to you.<sup>27</sup> As Lonergan describes this method, "The key to success is to keep advertent to what has not yet been understood."<sup>28</sup>

Since there are no clear steps involved, is it valid to call the self-correcting process of learning a *method*? No, not if a method must be procedure designed for known results. But if by *method* we understand any process that produces progressive and converging results, then it certainly is a method. The self-correcting process of learning does not guarantee unassailable truth. But it makes progress by posing questions and accumulating answers into an overall coherent account that survives the test of "most plausible explanation."

We can clarify this method by contrast with some common assumptions about how to understand texts. The self-correcting process of learning is not:

A recipe hermeneutic with ordered steps.

A proof-text hermeneutic looking for examples that support existing beliefs.

A certitude hermeneutic that would bar all further questions.

A scrapbook hermeneutic hoping to find passages to quote in a sermon or paste into an essay.

A dictionary hermeneutic that assumes words mysteriously contain meanings and, therefore, that the Bible contains God's words.

A one-way hermeneutic that expects to learn about others without being personally affected.

It is rather an author-engagement hermeneutic: It aims toward understanding the objects the author is writing about, what the words meant to the author, the author's horizon of concerns, and how the author affects one's own horizon.

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<sup>27</sup> See "Judging the Correctness of One's Interpretation," *Method in Theology*, ch. 7, nbr 6, pp. 162-165.

<sup>28</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 164. If I may add a personal observation, the habit of noticing exactly where we don't understand something is not established quickly. But the effort to develop the habit does speed up the process of reading for comprehension.

Moreover, the method works. This becomes plain if we accept that the goal of interpreting texts is not absolute certitude but progress toward ensuring the most plausible understanding. Lonergan emphasizes that the criterion for determining that one's interpretation is correct is whether or not the interpretation meets all the relevant questions. Since the criterion for judging the correctness of one's interpretation is the absence of further relevant questions, exegetes must collaborate for the simple reason that no individual can assume to know all the relevant questions. These questions arise among the community of exegetes coming to understand the sources of a text and themselves. Progress shows as their collaboration converges over time on similar understandings. The objectivity of the process is the fruit of subjectivities alert to the dangers of bias and yet open to learning. In fact, a significant convergence on what scriptural authors meant is quite evident among the countless scriptural commentaries available today. Even where there are disagreements, whenever new textual evidence or new theories about learning or language come to light, open-minded exegetes are eager to reconsider their interpretations.

### ***A Dialectical Hermeneutic***

Some efforts at collaboration and self-awareness may blend well, and some cannot be blended. To the degree that Michael and Carolyn each present sufficiently plausible interpretations of Francesca's diary, they will chat about what they understand. Since each brings different interests based on different life experiences, they fully expect their explanations to differ in some respects but will try to blend them for the sake of a more complete, overall interpretation.

### **Four Conversions**

But some differences in interpretation result not from different life experiences but from radically incompatible meanings attached to any of four efforts fundamental to the human spirit: imagination, intelligence, morality, and love. The different meanings attached to each effort shape a person's *horizon*, understood as everything one knows and everything one can wonder about. Where the horizons of two people are incompatible, they are not overcome by efforts to blend interpretations. What are needed are complete about-face conversions of one's horizon away from deeply mistaken assumptions and toward well-grounded realizations. Corresponding to the above four fundamental efforts, I will refer to the four conversions of horizons that may occur as *imaginational, intellectual, moral, and affective*.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Here too I follow the work of Bernard Lonergan, as well as explorations of a *psychic* conversion by Robert Doran. While the concept of the *psyche* is legitimately related to

To understand the differences between unconverted and converted forms of these horizons, we may imagine them in their extreme forms. Suppose Michael has undergone none of the four conversions and Carolyn has undergone all four. With each conversion we will find both a repudiation of certain assumptions and an opening onto a fully grounded horizon.

### *Imaginational Conversion: A Self-World Drama*

A major imaginational assumption to repudiate is that our lives are shaped mainly by our thinking, and that our imagination and feelings have only occasional connections with other levels of our consciousness. Under an imaginational conversion, we recognize the vast and pervasive world of our inner symbols—the affect-laden images that deeply affect our entire consciousness, often without our notice. These inner symbols function in three vital ways. One, they shape and color all our conscious acts, daydreams and night-dreams included. Two, they provide the inner media by which we meet the natural demand of consciousness to integrate our bodily spontaneities, thoughts, choices, and loves. Three, they represent ourselves to ourselves not only as having personal styles, interests, emotions, thoughts, preferences, choices, and activities, but also as being situated in a world in which these activities make a sort of self-world drama. **30**

A clear example of a self-world drama comes from a novel about the 1916 Irish Rebellion. In his late teens, Ned Halloran becomes aware of a "story" that encompasses all of life:

War and death and babies being born. Ned tried to stretch the horizons of his mind to encompass them all in one world vision. It was the babies, he decided, who made the rest of it bearable, who redeemed the horror adults could perpetrate. A child . . . was created by the same species that manufactured guns and submarines—but with one added element: the Divine Spark, an immortal soul. **31**

Note that these are the author's words, not Ned's. Rarely do we find characters in stories speaking explicitly of their self-world drama because for them, the drama is unfolding, the plot unclear. This is true of fiction,

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Freud's theory of the censor and is an apt category for the realm of human imagination and feelings, I use *imaginational* conversion here because the concept of *imagination* is more immediately recognizable and more clearly related to the symbolic dimensions of our psyche.

**30** The concept of a self-world drama incorporates the symbolic dimensions of a 'saving tale' in the works of Eric Voegelin, the articulation of a 'psychic conversion' in the works of Robert Doran, and the functional articulation of 'symbols and stories' in the works of Bernard Lonergan.

**31** Morgan Llywelyn, *1916: A Novel of the Irish Rebellion* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates/Forge, 2010), ch. 30.

biographies, and of many people's self-awareness. A certain cluster of imagination and passion carries most of us forward. Absent an imaginal conversion, this imaginative drama shapes our lives without our notice. Under an imaginal conversion, we notice, name, and reflect on the self-world drama in which we imagine ourselves.

Thus, Michael inadvertently imagines himself as a capable individual living among other capable individuals. Together they manage how the world runs. They expect short-term failures but press on toward long-term success. This life-drama is played out among individuals all over the world. But Carolyn adverts to an image of herself as part of a global network of care, each person engaged in a drama of interdependence with others and openness to being a vital part of a human family rooted in love.

### *Intellectual Conversion: What Learning Is*

The major intellectual assumption to repudiate is that learning is like looking at what is obviously "out there." Under an intellectual conversion one recognizes that learning comprises the inner events of experiencing, understanding, judgment, and belief. One understands how these elements combine in one way when we learn by first-hand experience and in quite another way when we believe others. One also distinguishes the different manners these elements combine in our common sense, in scholarship, in the arts, in theoretical pursuits, and in mystical experiences. One recognizes how everyone's fundamental horizons are rooted in the presence or absence of conversions. One grasps exactly why the self-correcting process of learning leads to interpretations that are objective.

Also to be repudiated is the assumption that intelligence is the dominant difference between humans and animals. Under an intellectual conversion, one recognizes that all human learning belongs to the larger process of a self-transcendence—a process that germinates in imaginative, self-world dramas; sprouts toward knowledge through experience, understanding, judgment and belief; and blossoms in a commitment to do the truly better and a trust in the mysterious forces of love.

For Michael, then, learning is very much like looking. Scrutinizing his mother's diary he takes careful notice of every word. Because he assumes that words contain meanings, where a text is not clear he imagines that he must look more closely. But Carolyn takes careful notice of where she does not understand. She regards her mother's diary as evidence awaiting her understanding of what her mother meant—which she hopes to understand by asking and answering questions in the self-correcting process of learning.

*Moral Conversion: Criteria for Better/Worse.*

A major moral assumption to repudiate is that *good* means good-for-me or good-for-us, along with the assumption that regret is to be measured by personal/group costs. In a converted horizon there is an anticipation that the good cannot be reduced to mere subjective or group satisfaction but is rather the object of a desire springing from the conscience of a person who recognizes certain moral norms immanent in his/her own imagination, mind, and heart, and is committed to following these norms.

So Michael assumes that because his mother's behavior pains him, she must have made a wrong choice. But Carolyn assumes that the moral standards of mature adults are based neither on pleasure over pain, nor on what benefits one party over another, nor on prohibitive laws, but on what is objectively better or worse. About Robert she has no regrets.

*Affective Conversion: Being in Love*

A major affective assumption to repudiate is that love is equivalent to individual desire and that among those who love one another, friendship is only a mutual attitude, not a higher, objective reality. In a converted horizon one recognizes that enduring bonds of love constitute objective realities characterized by a shared "we-consciousness" which does not obliterate one's "I-consciousness" but liberates "I-consciousness" to be fully self-transcending. This is easily recognized. When a Jack and Jill start serious dating, we refer to them as "an item," meaning that a bond between them has established a reality higher than the individuality of each. <sup>32</sup>

To Michael, his mother's actions are about loneliness and a desire for companionship. He regards his mother mainly in her individuality. But to Carolyn, her mother's actions are about a love that is not self-referring but self-expanding—a love that embraces a wandering stranger as welcome company in life's struggles, a living friendship founded on the love celebrated by classics the world over. She regards her mother as an individual who has become part of a union of love.

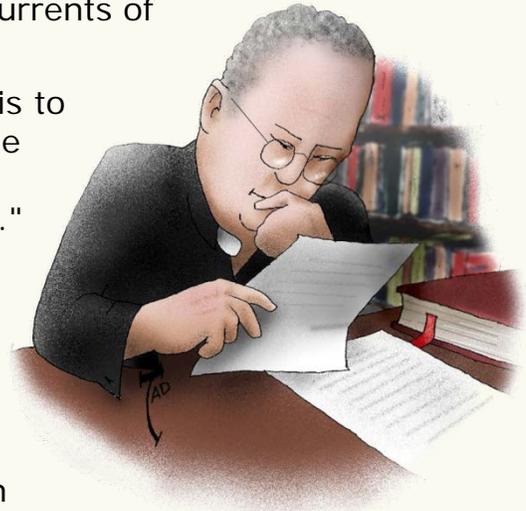
The four conversions that Carolyn has undergone are described here as implicit. She acts within her converted horizons without ever having thought about conversion or horizon. This is not unusual. Conversions are experiences, and experiences by themselves await the curiosity that might lead to understanding. Yet they occur, often in unnoticed redirections of efforts as people do their best to imagine their role in their self-world drama, to realistically think things through, to grow in moral integrity, and to

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<sup>32</sup> In Lonergan's view, the metaphysical reality of a "we" is established when investigators can identify a unity-identity-whole that can be investigated.

love. <sup>33</sup> Maturation moves like a symphony with four interweaving themes: a development in one draws forth developments in the other three. And on those who pay attention a realization may dawn that the dominant theme has always been love. So Carolyn imagines herself as part of a global drama of love, as thereby trusting the puzzlements and the questions that come to mind, and trying to do what seems objectively better because she has surrendered to the quiet and unpredictable currents of love.

Still, if the author-engagement hermeneutic is to advance toward consensus, such incompatible differences must be brought to light. As Carolyn might say, "Michael, we need to talk." Now the author-engagement hermeneutic enters a new phase.



### **An Invitational Strategy**

Scholars entering this phase move beyond understanding texts and themselves and toward understanding one another. Lonergan names this hermeneutic of horizons-exploration a *dialectic*. The strategy is not to debate or refute but to bring fundamental differences in horizons into the open. <sup>34</sup> It is similar to the ordinary strategy of telling one another, "Oh, say more." Natural intelligence prompts scholars to wonder about at least five distinct but related concerns. They would ask each other to expand on the *relevance* of certain interpretations to one's faith life, to give concrete *examples*, to *clarify* what they meant, to describe what sort of *actions* would follow, and to comment on residual *problems*. As scholars amplify their interpretations in these ways, they reveal further evidence regarding the status of their conversions, whether absent, minimal, developing or full. The same is true of ordinary members of believing communities. It is an event of deepening engagement between real people—between an exegete and his/her sources, between many exegetes studying the same texts, and between ordinary members of a believing community—as each becomes a stronger member of a single body in history.

This mutual engagement promotes conversion by invitation. Inasmuch as Michael prizes Carolyn as a person of authenticity, he admires her image of

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<sup>33</sup> Lonergan: ". . . conversion is commonly a slow process of maturation. It is finding out for oneself and in oneself what it is to be intelligent, to be reasonable, to be responsible, to love." *Method in Theology*, 201.

<sup>34</sup> Lonergan: "The theologian's strategy will be, not to prove his own position, not to refute counter-positions, but to exhibit diversity and to point to the evidence for its roots. In this manner he will be attractive to those that appreciate full human authenticity and he will convince those that attain it." *Method in Theology*, 254.

herself in the world, her intelligence and solid judgment, her commitment to what is objectively better, and her surrender to being in love.<sup>35</sup> So he feels attracted, invited, even hopeful to allow in himself at least initial breakthroughs to her imaginational, intellectual, moral, and affective horizons. For each newly emerging question, he moves toward deeper understanding of Francesca, of Carolyn, and himself. Again, Lonergan: "It is not an infallible method, for men easily are unauthentic, but it is a powerful method, for man's deepest need and most prized achievement is authenticity."<sup>36</sup>

### **The Context of History**

To move forward our question of how this dialectical hermeneutic for interpreting the Bible can ensure that readers of the Bible correctly grasp the significance of what they read, we need to incorporate textual interpretations into the wider context of history. Historical accounts do more than convey bald facts and define historical periods. They affect the very horizons within which people understand themselves. They provide historical understanding of foundational documents. They influence moral codes, laws, cultural critiques, and community rituals. Historical accounts of literature, plays, and poetry shape the popular imagination of a community's place in history and hoped-for destiny. And just as exegetes explore the self-world drama of a community as expressed in primary texts, so historians explore how the developments and distortions of that dramatic vision affect the community over time. Their effort here is first to propose what was going forward and then to assess what was progress, what was decline, and what was redemptive.<sup>37</sup>

An effective strategy for historians, like that for exegetes and ordinary members of believing communities, is a dialectical engagement. It aims to uncover fundamental differences by encouraging amplification. And where the differences lie in the roots, those living in horizons rooted in imaginational, intellectual, moral, and affective conversions will have a

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<sup>35</sup> In *Doing Better: The Next Revolution in Ethics* (Marquette University Press, 2010), I distinguish the tasks of "Learning about Learning," "Choosing How We Choose," and "Letting Love Love." See pp. 100-143.

<sup>36</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 254.

<sup>37</sup> The triad of progress, decline, and redemption represents Lonergan's understanding of historical process. See "Progress and Decline" and "Faith," ch. 2, sec. 7, and ch. 3, sec. 7 in *Method in Theology*, pp. 52-55, 115-18. For a summary treatment, see "The People of God in the World of Today," sec. 4 of "The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William J.F. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), pp. 1-9, at 7-8). Note that the "redemption" element is not a proposal on how to redeem decline. Rather it is an intrinsic element already present in history. It is by successive approximations toward fuller historical knowledge that a historian would ask first about progress, then about decline, and then about redemption.

beckoning, inviting effect on those whose horizons fall short of full conversion.

Throughout the Bible there is one recurring self-world drama that justifies calling it *a book*, indeed a book for all history. It is the drama of a world “in sin and error pining” and of God always working to heal and create a beloved people in history. <sup>38</sup> This drama expresses a fundamental belief regarding what the world is truly about. Augmentations of this belief come in many forms: scriptural commentaries, historical accounts, creeds, systematic theologies, moral codes, biographies of saints, cultural critiques, liturgical rites, plays, poems, hymns, and every sort of pastoral and spiritual writing. Taken together, the communities behind these texts invite later readers toward the affective conversion that opens their hearts to God and to solidarity with the original authors and fellow believers. Surrender to this love involves a reorientation of a person’s self-world drama. It leads immediately to a moral conversion to laboring for the truly good even when self-sacrifice is needed. And it leads, perhaps slowly but surely, to an intellectual conversion that learns that all learning belongs to the larger process of a self-transcending openness to what is truly real, good, and loving.



## ***Dialectical Hermeneutics & the Bible***

### **Toward a Conclusion**

We asked how a community of faith ensures that readers of the Bible correctly understand the significance of what they read. A brief review will help us move toward our conclusion.

- The Bible is a collection of many books, each written to share the faith, hope, and love of a specific community.

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<sup>38</sup> The conviction of believers that God is always at work for our sakes is evident throughout the Bible. Thus Isaiah: "I held myself in check; but now I groan like a woman in labor, panting and gasping" (4: 14). And Paul: "It is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work according to what God desires" (Phil 2: 31). Also, Paul's conviction that we become fit dwellings of God's Spirit, with whom we groan in labor pains (Rom 8: 22-23, 26-28). Similarly, Ignatius Loyola, who contemplates Christ as inviting followers to labor with him and contemplates God "as one who labors. (See his *Spiritual Exercises*, para. 95, 236.)

- The Bible does not contain God's words. It is rather a medium by which earlier communities hope to evoke faith in later communities.
- The connection between the Bible and religions involves hermeneutics—rules for interpretation.
- A hermeneutic of inspiration and a hermeneutic of author engagement are both relevant to interpreting the Bible.
- A hermeneutic of the self-correcting process of learning is highly effective for an engagement between authors and readers of any literature.
- This self-correcting process of learning opens the question of one's possibly erroneous assumptions about one's self-world drama, learning, morality, and love; one overcomes these errors through corresponding imaginational, intellectual, moral and affective conversions.
- Interpretations are best understood within the larger context of historical movements.
- A dialectical hermeneutic of a mutual exposure of horizons is highly effective for helping exegetes, historians, and ordinary believers feel invited to undergo imaginational, intellectual, moral, and affective conversions.
- The presence of these conversions in readers who articulate and amplify to others what they grasp renders their interpretations far more consistent with the faith of the originating biblical communities.

Here, then, is our conclusion:

A hermeneutic of author-engagement, followed by dialectical hermeneutic involving a mutual exposure of horizons and the experience of feeling invited to conversion and membership in the body of believers is quite effective in ensuring that readers of the Bible they correctly grasp the significance of what they read.

Practically speaking, readers who follow the author-engagement hermeneutic for encouragement, insight, or moral guidance would seek to understand their inspirations as received, in part, through the faith of the particular community behind the text.

It is important to keep in mind that a person cannot ignore the invitation altogether and still claim to be open to all relevant questions. Still, a person can understand the invitation and not accept it. After all, invitations motivated by love would respect the beloved's freedom to find his or her

own way. Many scholars in religious studies fully understand the invitational intent of biblical authors without either fully accepting or rejecting it. <sup>39</sup>

### **An Example**

There are countless and diverging ways in which scholars might decline the biblical invitation. But the ways in which scholars and ordinary readers accept the invitation tend to converge. So we might ask, What would this look like for people who consciously try to live out the four conversions within a commitment to God rooted in the biblical invitation? Much depends on the religion of the reader, of course. So here I can provide brief descriptions of the sort of engagement as might occur among Christians. As you read them, you may feel a sense of being invited. You may feel a puzzled resistance about accepting, even without being able to explain why. You may recognize that, somehow, somewhere, you already accepted the invitation.

#### *Imaginational Conversion: A Saving Self-world drama*

Since biblical faith welcomes an active God who is now saving a people in history, a corresponding self-world drama will be an imaginative salvation history—a saving tale. One imagines oneself and one's world as deficient and restless within a field of saving love. And in this field God constantly works to make a holy family, a Kingdom of love and peace. Christians imagine themselves as the historical progeny of Jesus of Nazareth and those who follow him, all committed to carrying the cross, all fearing loss of faith more than loss of life, and all invigorated by the gift of God's own Spirit of Love. They imagine the world, person by person, culture by culture, as in need of the healing of bias and willfulness that undermine being in love. Their self-world drama is the Paschal tale of love, death, and resurrection with Jesus of Nazareth, and the continuous living out of this tale among his followers. <sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The late Lutheran scholar Krister Stendahl commented on what he called a *holy envy* regarding what is beautiful and meaningful in other religions. See *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version*, eds. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford University Press, 2011), xiii.

<sup>40</sup> Ignatius of Loyola was clearly aware of the role played by self-world dramas in spiritual growth. His *Spiritual Exercises* employ a practice of contemplation that relies chiefly on imaginative and emotional entries into gospel scenes and minimally on Jesus' miracles and teachings. Ignatius incorporates these exercises under a self-world drama that opposes the love of riches, honors, and self-importance to a love for the poverty, humiliations and humility one shares with Jesus.

## *Intellectual Conversion: The Real Assent of Faith*

Since biblical faith regards what really is so and really is good, a believer will seek a real assent and personal surrender to the truth about God, the world, sin, suffering, death, hope, faith, love, and the actual history of salvation. <sup>41</sup> About God, a believer will assent to the reality that God self-expresses in an eternal Word, in whom and for whom everything is created, and that God's inner Word became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth who lived, loved, and died for the sake of everyone he knew as well as anyone in need of God's word. A believer will assent to the reality that through God's Word, God's own Spirit dwells in human hearts. A believer will assent to the reality of the resurrection of Jesus as God's pledge of a hope for all humans—a hope beyond death and beyond description, since "eye has not seen, ear has not heard, what God has prepared for those who love him."

These truths are the saving teachings of a religion. I use the term *saving teachings* here to subordinate the Bible's many factual and moral meanings to the redemptive elements of religious conversion—a liberation from sinful habits, a welcome of being in love with God, a heartfelt participation among a community of believers, and an abiding hope for the entire human family. <sup>42</sup> Moreover, most biblical works demonstrate the conviction that God will provide believing communities with persistent guidance, inspiration, and discernment. Consequently, individuals seeking to grasp the significance of what they read will draw not only on personal inspiration but also on the beliefs of their communities in a forum where horizons are brought to light. In other words, one reads biblical passages not only for personal inspiration but also for understanding them as evidence of the faith of

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<sup>41</sup> In 1959, Lonergan contrasted false philosophies and degrading myths with "a true philosophy or a true symbolic vision of life." His use of *true* for philosophical and symbolic expressions alike suggests that a real assent is required for each. See *Topics in Education*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 10 (University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 64.

<sup>42</sup> The move from understanding authors to formulating these saving teachings is not done in a single step. In his *Method in Theology*, Lonergan details the entire movement from original texts to saving teachings in eight successive theological specialties: 1. *Research* provides the exegete with the materials needing interpretation. 2. *Interpretation* is the work of the exegete. 3. *History* incorporates textual interpretations into an account of what is going forward in history. 4. *Dialectic* reveals reasons for different accounts, including the presence or absence of conversions in the sources, the exegetes, and the historians. 5. *Foundations* establishes the appropriate terms for speaking of the conversions and positions that *Dialectic* reveals. 6. *Doctrines* states the saving teachings in the terms established in *Foundations*. 7. *Systematics* organizes these saving teachings into a system. 8. *Communications* establishes interdisciplinary relations between saving teachings and other scholarly and scientific disciplines; it adapts the theological language to its audience; and it adapts to the media that will communicate the saving teachings most effectively.

founding communities and for experiencing their invitation to share in their faith.

*Moral Conversion: The Good Rooted in Love*

Similarly, since biblical faith regards what is truly good, a believer will embrace what is truly good about self-sacrifice, a familial identification with the poor, a fearlessness about death, and a joy of being a "we" with God and God's People. Egotism and group favoritism are displaced by a conviction that what is truly good here and now arises from, and heads toward, the unfathomable mystery of God's love and Kingdom. Believers test whether their inspirations arise more from their being in love with God and God's family than from intellectual analyses and certainly more from desires for personal gain. The biblical tradition of a discernment of inspirations, a more recent attention to a discernment of stories,<sup>43</sup> and a dialectical hermeneutic of mutual exposure of horizons serve to "test the spirits."

*Affective Conversion: A Religious Conversion*

Since biblical faith is fundamentally about God's Kingdom-making love, believers will read the Bible to be acquainted with the many ways God works in history and in hearts to bring about a true, and truly saved, human family, a people beloved of God, a people loved with God's own self-love. In this manner, an affective conversion that recognizes the general priority of love expands into a fully religious conversion that surrenders all one has, and all one is, to God's love and work in an actual community.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Following the methods of discernment of Ignatius Loyola, I have prepared "Rules for Discerning Inspirations" and "Rules for Discerning Stories" at

<http://users.wowway.com/~tdunne5273/DiscInsp.pdf> and <http://users.wowway.com/~tdunne5273/DiscStor.pdf>, respectively.

<sup>44</sup> As you may have gathered by now, I sincerely hope you understand that the sort of dialectical engagement I have been describing is not a new proposal. Rather it has been a central but largely unnoticed factor wherever communities of faith grasp correctly grasp the significance of what they read in the Bible.